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James Stern is a young Irish writer who at seventeen left home for the interior of Africa where he has remained until quite recently. "The Force" is appearing this Fall in a volume "The Heartless Land," (*Mac-Millan*, London) together with several other short stories, five of which have appeared recently in the *London Mercury*... Naomi Shumway is an American whose "Ike" emerged this Spring from the New York University "fiction workshop" conducted by Sylvia Chatfield Bates... Roderick Lull, who has written for *Pagany* and other new reviews, is a citizen of Portland, Oregon... Leane Zugsmith, a native of Louisville, whose work has appeared in the *American Mercury*, is the author of three novels, "All Victories Are Alike" and "Goodbye And Tomorrow," and one out in October, "Never Enough;" she is connected with the publishing house of *Liveright, Inc.*... Carlton Brown, who has previously written for *Story*, is living in Southern France... Theodore Pratt is a resident of Puerto de Pollensa, Majorca. He is a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*.

THE FORCE

by

James Stern

IT was what they call in the British South African Police a One-Man Station—a two-roomed, one-storey house made of sunburnt brick, with a corrugated-iron roof. And it was one hundred and fifty miles from a town and seventy miles from a railway.

Big-boned, mature, strong and healthy men, such as George Newman was, were chosen from the Force to take over One-Man Stations. At one time they thought married men were more suited than single men to occupy these posts, but the wives did not share this view, and it was a failure. So bachelors were sent alone to administer justice and keep the peace in remote, unimportant places. Their pay was very good, and they could save money; they had to save money, for there was nothing to buy. And big men were chosen: the smaller, younger members of the Force being given stations near towns, in towns; and the goodlooking, more refined boys were sent to the Matopo Hills and the Victoria Falls where wealthy tourists came to gaze at the resting place of Cecil Rhodes and to hear the tremendous roar of the falling Zambesi river. Occasionally one of these young men would disappear and never be seen again. But, as a rule, during the week-ends they got drunk at the tourists' expense, and tried to go to bed with unattached American girls of the party. They did not always succeed, but at least they had a chance to try. Some paid no heed to the tourists, contenting themselves with the company of each other.

George Newman was a large man of thirty, with small eyes, a swollen nose, and a sallow, parched skin. He had been on the station, in his two-roomed house, for nine months before he was given a fortnight's leave. During those months he had not seen a white man, nor spoken a word of English. And when the day came for him to leave he was in a chronic

nervous condition. He had looked forward so much, for so long, to this short holiday that he realized suddenly, at the last moment, he was loth to go. Perhaps even then, if a stranger had come to spend a few days at the station, he would have remained, welcoming wholeheartedly the stranger's arrival, which would give him an excuse to spend his fortnight where he had been for so long. It was a four days' ride into town, and Newman was aware that when he got there he would know no one, for he came from hundreds of miles further south and in his life he had spent only one night in the town. What he would do there was the chief subject that had occupied his mind on the station. As he rode out to patrol the kraals, when he talked to the Kaffir Chiefs, while he collected their tax-money and paid his own boy's wages, while he spent his spare hours cultivating his own few acres of mealies, while he listened to the natives who came to him with their wrongs, and when in the evenings he sat alone with a bottle of whisky and a cheap book he had read before—all the time, day and night, he thought of what he would do when he got his leave and arrived in the town. And the town itself, possessing little more than a thousand whites, grew in Newman's brain to resemble at last some fantastic city with glaring lights revealing the delirious night-life of a West European capital. He would arrive, and with all the money he had saved he would be able to buy the greatest pleasure and comfort the town could offer! He would have a large bedroom at the Grand Hotel, a real bath, and he would drink at the Club and make friends who would introduce him to a woman, two women, lots of women—and he would dance and drink, and after the dance—ah, God knows! a large bedroom in the Grand Hotel and handfuls of money! Would there be such resistance? He could offer anything within reason that money could buy, and with it his clean, inviolate, tortured self. Maybe—maybe he would not return alone! And when at last, as he got into bed at nights, he would smile to himself at the thought of his approaching freedom.

But when the day came he did not smile. Instead, as he set off with his few belongings strapped to his horse, a feeling of dread possessed him, his mouth was dry, and many times he was on the point of returning to the lonely station. When the world jumped to reality before his

eyes, when his dreams faded and he saw the friendless town as it actually was, with its sordid low houses and mean shops and empty hotels, then he would waver in disbelief of himself, plunge back into his loneliness, fearing the thought of social contact with men and women who would look at him and talk to him while he would gaze at them and be left with nothing to say. He could not hear himself talking, could not hear strange English sentences issuing from his mouth. And he asked himself what he *would* say, how he would carry on a conversation—and there was no answer. He had nothing to talk about but himself: he had said nothing for nine months, and now thought and words had left him. He had talked only to the Kaffirs, in their strange dialect, in a strained, half-furtive way. There was no communion between man and man—the black and the white—even in the loneliness of the latter. It could not be. Newman was not a man who despised Kaffirs, though he was conscious, as a civilized white, of the superiority of his own race. This he took for granted, although the dubious fact had never been proved. He did not despise them; unconsciously he was deeply envious of them, of their innate happiness, their freedom, their lives void of responsibility. He was wounded by their calm acceptance of living, troubled neither by ambition nor malice. It made him harbour an ember of bitterness within him, but which he kept under control so successfully that to the world at large it would have seemed like a brooding smoulder of smoke, lacking any fire. And the women, the Kaffir women, he feared, as a child fears to trespass upon forbidden ground; but it was a fear all the more desirable to overcome for the very reason that it was prompted by a taboo. And Newman found the desire very strong: in him there was a force working that often came near to overpowering him, near to shattering his "race-respect." To the Kaffir himself he paid no heed; Newman resented him, but for their women his normal, ever-increasing life-force rolled about and surged in him like a turbulent sea caught in the grip of a gorge, unable to free itself, thrust back on its own tide till the force of that tide urged it forward again, to smash its waters against the relentless rocks called colour.

And now he was to be free. He *was* free, riding into the town

towards men and women whence he himself had sprung, to a world constructed by the hands of civilized people, who every day made the sight of the earth more and more grotesque and hideous. These men would not accept the freedom they were offered: there was innate striving wherever they lived. And he shrank from it, feeling cut off, inferior, lacking in grace, and alone.

And then he would think of himself back in the station again, sitting alone by a candle, while the whisky sunk lower and lower in the bottle—and instantly a sharp revolt would spring up in him. To turn back was impossible, the sense of failure and humiliation too strong to bear and, fortifying himself with dreams he did not really believe in, he rode on.

In his imagination he had seen the town many hundreds of times, but in none of his visions had it looked so dreary and friendless as it did when he entered it on the afternoon of the fourth day's ride. It was very hot and the bare wide streets were empty but for a few ragged natives leaning against the walls of dilapidated shanties or sitting playing marbles with pebbles in the gutter. As Newman rode into the yard to stable his horse a man in a panama hat and a tropical suit walked leisurely across the arid square in front of the Grand Hotel. And that was all; there was no one else, nothing more, nothing but silence and the empty streets and drab houses whence waves of shimmering heat rose into the clear, spotless sky.

When he had ordered a room he left the hotel. But at the end of two hours he had walked through every street in the town and he had seen no one to whom he even wished to say a word. He went to the Club, where he signed on for a week's membership: he sat down to read the papers, but it was so long since he had heard any news of the world that the word-covered sheets now failed to interest him. And the Club was empty. He returned to the hotel, hating the town, hating the Police Force, hating Africa, despising himself. He had a bath, and then, throwing himself on the bed, fell fast asleep.

It was already late when he woke with a shock to find himself in a hotel bedroom. He got up quickly, washed, and went to the Club. Over

the bar a group of big, brown-faced farmers sat drinking and talking about the latest prices of stock, their own immediate woes, and the prospects of rain in the near future. Newman listened, drinking whiskies and water. But nothing he heard either concerned or interested him. And the farmers seemed unaware of his presence. A member of the town police came in in uniform. Newman knew the man by sight, but until he came over and asked him if he were in the Force, Newman found it impossible to bring himself to make the other any sign of recognition. He told Newman his name was Bright, and then Newman remembered he had met him in the town the day before he had gone to the station. At first Bright talked not without difficulty, for to whatever question he asked of him Newman always answered with a curt yes or no. Newman wished to talk, longed to talk, longed to appear friendly to this man who had gone so far towards helping him as to introduce himself. But he could not conquer his reserve, and he kept thinking what he would say if he spoke: he framed a sentence between each gulp of whisky, choosing his words with infinite care: he would think of asking Bright if there were anything to do in the town during the coming few days, but when he had almost formed the sentence and the words were on his lips it occurred to him suddenly that Bright might imagine he were seeking his companionship during that time. And the fact that this was in part true prevented him speaking, and he would drink again to conceal his embarrassment. He was about to ask Bright in what part of the town he lived, but even this question he could not force out of himself for fear that Bright would think he wished to come with him to his home. And he refrained from saying more than a few words about himself because he felt well-disposed toward the other man and did not wish to bore him with depressing details of his monotonous existence on the station. And that was all the conversation he had, that and asking questions, and questions he felt constrained to avoid in case Bright should think him too curious. And Bright talked on at random about his wife and his child and the hope they had of saving enough money to take a short holiday by the sea. It would be good for the child. Was Newman married? No? Well, in his opinion, life wasn't worth living

upcountry in Africa until you were married. He had not had much to do with women himself, he had always prided himself on being a "woman-hater," until he met his wife; but now he realized how wrong he had been, and since then he did not believe there was such a person as a "woman-hater." Oh, Newman must get married. And Newman smiled. It was a curious sensation, smiling. Quite strange to Newman. He was not smiling at anything humorous, but merely at the ironic thought that crossed his mind. He must get married! Bright might just as well have told him he must get wings and take a trip to the moon! Give him the wings, give him the woman! Yes, Newman could quite well believe life was almost pleasant with a wife. He began to visualize Bright's life. His wife, yes, she was probably charming, young, good-looking. Where was she now? Sitting at home, waiting for him to come back, while he stood at the bar drinking his seventh whisky and telling a strange man how wonderful it was to be married. Newman supposed this must be the case. Would he, would he stand about in bars and drink whisky if he had a woman? He doubted it. But even if he wanted to, there were no bars, nowhere to stand about away from one's wife, on the station. But then if he were married he would not be on the station. Newman thought of Bright as a man who did not appreciate his luck, did not appreciate precisely what he was telling him he appreciated, and he began to resent him. What right had he to a wife? He felt bitter. But when, just before he left the bar, Bright asked him to come to a Saturday night dance at the Grand Hotel with himself and his wife, the bitter look on Newman's face vanished and he accepted the invitation with eagerness. Saturday was the last day of his leave. Thank God there was something to look forward to!

"There are never many there," Bright said, "because there are so few unmarried girls in the town, but if you can find a partner—well, bring her along. Goodbye, Newman—glad to have met you. See you Saturday!" And they shook hands and Bright went out, a little unsteadily.

Newman ordered another whisky, feeling more cheerful than he had felt for a long time. He knew someone now. And Bright must have liked him or he would not have bothered to offer the invitation. But Newman

wished the dance were to-night. It was only Monday, and he had five whole days to kill. And he had no wish to "kill" them. He was on leave, on holiday: he was supposed to be enjoying himself; every hour he had dreamed would be an hour of pleasure. And here he was drinking himself half stupid in a bar, looking forward almost with dread to the next few days and with pleasure to some little dance with another man's wife on the eve of the day when once more he would have to return to the station. The Station! He shuddered at the thought. He had only just arrived in the town, and already he was looking forward to the night before he had to return! A frail hope entered his head when he thought of the possibility of meeting someone at the dance. It is odd to what little things an unhappy man will cling for happiness. But what had Bright said? "There are never many there, because there are so few girls in the town." No, the little hope grew smaller, nearly vanished. His spirits began to subside, and quite suddenly he knew he had drunk too much. His head was nodding and his eyes closed themselves against his will. With a noble effort he pulled himself together, paid for eight whiskies, and went to the dining-room to eat. Food would sober him. But he gobbled his food, not tasting it and felt the sleepiness of much alcohol creeping over him. He knew he must get up, have one more drink to postpone the drowsiness, and then go out into the air.

The streets were poorly lighted, but a million stars sufficiently illuminated the night to show Newman the wide unpeopled streets. The sleeping town was without sound; not a stir among the leaves of the gum trees lining the pavements. There was a singing in Newman's ears, fumes of alcohol floated in his head, and a wildness unknown to him rose from his bowels, taking possession of his body as tongues of flame envelop the coals of a newly lighted fire. He knew the way back to the hotel, could have walked it in his sleep, but he had no desire to go home. During the queer momentary glimpses of clarity in his befuddled brain he was aware of the visions that had come to him on the station, visions of the nights he would spend in town, of the glaring streets busy with traffic and the wild exotic life of hundreds of men and women whose sole occupation till the hours appeared with dawn, was pleasure.

In the wide streets he saw corners that did not exist, where women stood watching, hoping, silent. And he gripped a wad of bank notes in his trousers pocket, all the time turning away from his hotel, down darker, narrower streets, watching, hoping against hope. For Newman knew Africa. No white women walked the streets in upcountry towns. White women were more rare than gold, more valuable than the most precious stone. Queens, they reigned supreme, respected, in a land their men annexed by force, bowed down to by all because of the colour of their skins. Spinsters were only that from their own wish, in upcountry towns. And they had to fight even for spinsterhood. The streets, the meanest and the widest, were empty for Newman; no living thing accosted his hopeless wandering. He walked in circles, like a man lost in the desert, frustrated desire giving way slowly to despair, and in his loneliness he staggered back to his room. The night air had awakened fresh thirst in his parched throat, and he rang the bell. A native girl, dressed in black with a white apron, came to the door in answer, and Newman ordered a whisky. He watched her leave the room with her head lowered, and he watched her return with her face bent over the glass on the tray, and when she closed the door behind her he uttered a little stifled cry and threw himself on the bed and buried his face in the pillow....

When George Newman put on his one suit and went down to the dance-room on Saturday night, conflicting emotions of hope and despair fought within him. He had spent the previous four days of his leave in much the same way as he had spent the first. But he had not seen Bright again, nor had he had the good fortune to fall in with anyone to whom he could talk. He had drunk a great deal in the Club and he had taken his meals there, and he had wandered aimlessly, hopelessly, round the town, visiting bars, shops, and the small hotel lounges; he had bought a new suit which he now wore, and every night he had staggered to his room and thrown himself on the bed in a drunken stupor. The excess of liquor was now apparent on his face; his eyes were bloodshot, the lids swollen, his hands shook, and the flesh on his face was pale and

puffy. Innumerable cigarettes had stained the fingers of both his hands a deep brown.

As he stood at the entrance to the danceroom and heard the music and the sound of people talking and laughing he tried to shut out his thoughts of the next day. He sat down on a chair and ordered a whisky. Lighting a cigarette, he fell to wondering what it would be like to dance again, to put his arm round a woman's waist, and hold her hand and close himself up against her—when he heard a voice near him: "Hullo, Newman! Let me introduce my wife!"

Newman rose quickly from his chair and put out his hand. He felt thin, lifeless fingers crumple in his grasp, and he looked up into the face of Elsa Bright. It was a tired and faded face, drawn and haggard, though Newman saw that she could not be older than himself. There were shadows under her watery eyes, and the thin rouged lips were too bright for the sallow, lightly powdered face.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Newman," she said weakly, but the listless tone of her voice rather attracted Newman. He felt that she was submissive, tired, and it gave him a sense of superiority which he was far from feeling for the others in the room.

They sat at a small table near the band where a little Jew played the piano and another white accompanied him on a violin. A boy made noises with his feet and banged when he felt like it on a drum. It is strange that though music is in the very bones of the African people, the white man continues in vain to try and find it in stray dilettantes of his own colour. In Africa bar-tenders and waiters in hotels are generally Indians; and in Paris, the only capital in the world where all skins speak the same language and black dances freely with white, the dance bands of the greatest reputation in that city are composed of negroes who understand no tongue but American!

A dozen couples turned round and round, walked up and down together, on the small dancing space: most of them danced with no sense of rhythm, apologizing to each other for the mistakes they made with their feet, but blushing and stammering little sentences of encouragement in their efforts to believe that they were enjoying themselves.

Newman thought them very pathetic. And he looked at Elsa Bright, and his hopes fell. Her thin green dress sagged from her shoulders, and she sat in a jaded fashion, her back slightly bent so that to all appearances she might have been breastless. Then she glanced up, suddenly aware of his gaze, but looked away again, embarrassed. And Newman felt sorry for her, wishing to apologize for his lack of grace, wanting to excuse himself with the help of some insincere compliment. He would like to talk to her: he felt he *could* talk to this woman, for he felt she was unhappy; and they could share their mutual unhappiness with words of consolation and sympathy. But there was Bright, sitting opposite him with his eyes fixed on a girl at the next table. No, he couldn't talk to her as he wished while Bright was there. Then a waiter appeared, and Bright ordered food.

"Then you didn't find a fourth?" he suddenly asked of Newman.

"Er . . . no," stammered Newman; "you see, I really don't know anyone here."

"Too bad. I know some girls here to-night, but I'm afraid they're all with their partners. And—well, you know how it is, they don't like to be separated."

"Oh, that's all right," said Newman with embarrassment, suddenly terrified at the thought of being obliged to take a strange girl away from her partner. "Quite all right, Bright. I'm not much of a dancer anyway—and I enjoy watching."

Having safely evaded what he thought might prove to be an awkward situation, Newman felt curiously pleased with himself. He glanced at Elsa Bright's pale face, and a longing came over him to lean forward and speak to her, to tell her he thought she looked tired and that he sympathized. He, too, was tired, and he too. . . . Then he realized with a shock that a man did not tell a woman he had just met even that she looked tired, although he might think so. And he felt hot and nervous at the thought of what he might have said. Food came, and from force of habit he put his hand round his tumbler to drink, and then was aware of its emptiness. He looked at the glass and his eyes brightened. With a certain appearance of excitement he leaned over the table.

"I say, Bright," he said, "you've been damn good to me; let me stand you and your wife a bottle of fizz. I've saved a pot of money and have nothing to spend it on."

"That's very nice of you," said Bright with a smile. And he turned to his wife. "What about you, dear?"

"Oh, I'd love it!" Elsa exclaimed. And her pallid face almost beamed as she glanced quickly at Newman.

And Newman felt a thrill pass through him. For an instant he was quite happy, conscious of having rendered a little happiness.

The Brights excused themselves and rose to dance. Newman sat back and watched them. He saw Elsa place her hand on her husband's shoulder, put her other hand in his; and that was how they danced, apart from each other, Bright gazing disinterestedly about, and Elsa with an expressionless stare looking over his shoulder as though nothing on earth could attract her attention. There was no contact between them, they were entirely separate, man and woman, and the intimacy that even the slow and painful foxtrot can bring to the bodies and faces of some failed in this couple to produce so much as a word from either. They were lifeless. Newman drank a glass of champagne, and a feeling of resentment rose in him against his host. Why couldn't he show a little enthusiasm? He had a woman: this woman was his wife; it was barely ordinary civility to plough round a room as though he were not aware of her existence. It was an insult. Could he not show appreciation of her presence by so little as a smile, a word? People could be very cruel to one another. He watched them walk rather than dance round the room till the band ceased and they sat down. He poured some champagne into Elsa's glass and she smiled and thanked him. He thought she looked happy that the dance was ended and that she was back again at the table.

"You do dance, Mr. Newman, don't you?" she asked suddenly, sipping her champagne.

"Oh, I used to once," he answered smiling; "but one gets out of it, you know. One gets out of everything, living alone. You probably don't know what it's like——"

But instantly he cut himself short, suddenly aware that he was going

too far. Bright was looking at him, and he fell silent under his gaze, lest he should be despised for talking of himself. The band struck up again, the Blue Danube just recognizable.

"Now you two!" said Bright heartily, patting his wife on the back. "Now it's your turn. I'm just going over to talk to the Oaklands." And he left the table and walked over to the other end of the room.

Newman drank off his champagne and got up. He led Elsa out onto the floor and put his arm round her waist. She was slim and his arm enveloped her, his hand resting on her right hip. He smiled down at her unconsciously and she smiled back, as though she knew him, liked him, felt his nearness. And they swung out into the room, closed together, from their breasts to their knees. At one time Newman had known how to dance and he had not forgotten. They glided noiselessly over the floor in silence. He felt no need to talk, and something told him there was no urge for speech in Elsa. As they passed her husband Newman looked down at him and saw that he was engrossed in conversation with those at his table. He steered her to the other end of the room and they waltzed in circles away from where her husband sat. He took a fleeting glance at the face almost on a level with his, her cheek nearly touching his own, and he saw her eyes shining and a little ripple of a smile hovering about her red lips. She looked up at him.

"I thought you said you couldn't dance!" she said, breaking into a low laugh.

"I didn't think I could!" he smiled back.

"Well, *I* say you can!"

"That's very sweet of you. I used to love dancing, but it's so long since——"

"When d'you have to go back?" she broke in, a little eagerly Newman thought.

"I start to-morrow morning."

"Start?"

"Yes, it's a good four days' ride."

"Oh dear. I didn't know you were as far away as that. They must be terribly lonely, those one-man stations."

"They are. I hate it," answered Newman, bitterly.

And they were silent then, wrapped as one, while they moved together over the floor. Newman felt a curious strength springing into his arms and he held her more firmly round the waist, pressing her fingers very slightly and feeling his own pressed in response. He shut his eyes and the champagne to which he was not accustomed mounted to his face, filling him with a pleasant sensation quite unknown to him. He wished the room to close in darkness, leaving him alone with the woman he had in his arms. He bent his head a little and some hairs of her head touched his cheek and the smell of her body rose up to him from the warmth of her breast. Some force was gripping him, rising in waves within him; the strength went out of his arms, surged back into the core of his being, and the spittle dried up in his mouth; it was not easy to dance any more.

"Shall we go and finish that bottle?" he said.

But Elsa did not answer. He looked down at her and her eyes were shut and her face pale: he felt her a little limp against his arm.

"Shall we——"

"Oh, I'm sorry," she almost whispered, opening her eyes. "Had you been speaking? I think I must have been in a kind of dream! Silly of me. Yes, let's sit down."

Newman led her to their table and they seated themselves on neighbouring chairs.

"Sure you're all right?" he asked with concern.

"Yes, absolutely. You dance too well, that's all!" And she looked up at him and laughed.

They sat drinking champagne. Bright was still at a distant table. Newman lighted a cigarette with a hand that trembled. He felt as though he had been running in some exciting race and had not altogether recovered his breath. He was not sure what had happened in the race, but he knew that his heart was now beating with unusual vigour. There was a tight feeling in his chest, and his head thumped regularly to the beat of his heart. His thoughts were entirely submerged in his own body, then in that of the woman next to him. To-night, in a moment, she would be gone: and to-morrow he—he would be gone. It was hard to believe

he would be gone, away from here, away from her, for he felt he had known her a long time, all his life. There was no need to talk to her now: there was no uneasiness in her company, no nervous wondering as to what he would say next. She was there, for him, with him, part of him, in the communion of their two selves. She did not speak, but it was as though she were talking to him all the time. And to-morrow. . . . When the band struck up once more he got up and she rose with him. There was no word spoken between them. And he led her out and put his arm round her and clasped her hand in his. It was as if it had always been like that. And yet there was no peace for him. The old force sprang up again, like a tidal wave, possessing him with the strength of a vice, weakening him. He gripped her tight and she melted into him: their legs were as two legs, hers pressed firmly against his, advancing and retreating with his own to the rhythm of the music. His mind became empty, his vision a phantasy of indistinct figures, and the blood in his head flowed down, drawn as though by a magnet, into the source of his body. Dancing became impossible for him, and they went back to the table.

Newman saw Bright standing there with his hat in his hand. "Well," he said jovially, "all good things must come to an end. I'm afraid we must be off now."

Newman stared at Bright without speaking. There seemed to him nothing to be said, and yet the idea that this man should walk away with the woman he had just been dancing with sounded hardly credible. And yet—she was his wife; he was nothing to do with either of them.

Elsa fumbled for her coat on her chair, her head lowered, away from the men. Newman bent down to assist her. Her coat was on. She put out her hand. Half-consciously Newman took it and pressed it, and was aware of the pressure of her thin fingers.

"Next time you are in town," she said in a weak, far-away voice, "you must come and stay with us. We have a room."

"Yes, that's right," Bright added; "come along and spend a week with us and we'll introduce you to some people. Love to have you."

Newman managed to smile. He dropped Elsa's hand. "Thank you," he said, "it's very kind of you. And thank you for this evening."

He followed the husband and wife from the room. As they reached the door Elsa Bright looked back over her shoulder. "And thank you," she almost whispered, "for dancing so beautifully."

But Newman could find nothing to say. And waving, Mr. and Mrs. Bright passed through the swing doors and out into the night.

Newman sat down in the chair from which only two hours before he had risen to meet Elsa Bright. All that had happened since then raced through his head in a series of mind-pictures, over and over again. He was getting up and clasping her thin, lifeless fingers, looking at her red mouth set in the pale face. They were sitting at the table and suddenly he was happy, ordering champagne. "Oh, I'd love it," she had said, and beamed on him. Newman shifted in his chair. Then they were dancing. "Oh dear, I didn't know you were as far away as that. They must be terribly lonely, those one-man stations." Terribly lonely! The one brick house, his bed, his table, his chair, the whisky bottle: the empty, friendless, silent days and nights of monotony! Lonely! "Yes, it is. I hate it!" And there had been silence then.

They were dancing: she was in his arms, pressed against him; he could feel her hair on his face; he shut his eyes, that unbearable force rose in him, she hung limp against his arm, and he could not dance any more. "You dance too well, that's all!" And they sat in silence, in a kind of mutual, silent communion. And they were dancing again, pressed together, melted into one another: but the force leapt up in him once more—as it was rising in him now—and Bright was standing at their table with his coat on. "Thank you for dancing so beautifully!" Thank you! Thank you!

With a groan Newman got up and went to his room. There was an acute ache in his loins. He sat on the bed and looked round the impersonal room. His pyjamas, his washing things, his riding clothes... nothing more. A detailed vision of the station appeared before his eyes: the little two-roomed, one-storey house, the table, the chair, the empty bed... Tomorrow: in a few hours...! He stretched out and rang the bell.

The same native girl who had answered his ring on the first night of his leave appeared in the doorway and smiled a recognition. Newman

looked at her, smiling involuntarily at her friendliness, and ordered a whisky.

While he waited he began to walk about the room. The pain in his loins was increasing, and now and again he stopped and bent down for relief. But his body still trembled from the strange physical contact of the evening, and he could not be still. Raging within him, the force of his manhood allowed him no peace.

The door opened and the girl came in with his whisky on a tray. She passed near him to lay it on the table, and as she passed, Newman smelled the full hot smell of her body. But he was not repulsed. Desire overruled it. He closed his eyes, trembling violently. Then he took a step towards her, not knowing that he moved: he put a hand on her shoulder as she turned to leave, and he looked down into her dark, inscrutable face, and a wildness seized him with the suddenness of a thunder clap; a torrent whose power was irresistible surged up in him, possessed his stricken limbs as his arms went about her, and the rocks called colour were conquered as the man and the woman fell slowly together where they stood, on the floor.

IKE AND US MOONS

by

Naomi Shumway

SOMETIME away back in Seventeen and Seventy, on the trek outa Virginia into Kentucky, one of Ike's ancestors saved one of our'n's life at the cost of his own, and ever since then our kin and his'n has sorta stuck together. Only our kin was the kind what prospered and become a power in the community, while Ike's was a fiddling fishing lot what always squatted on a piece of our land and expected us to feed them. I never heard tell of any of us Moons minding either. Reckon they liked having a nest of losels on their homeplace, same as My Dad did. But the Great Rebellion blowed everything to hell. Them of both families what wasn't kilt during the war died fighting the niggers afterwards, till long about Eighteen and Seventy they wasn't anybuddy left sept Ike and My Dad. They woulda stuck it out, even then, but Ike was only eight and My Dad twenty-two, and everything was mortgaged for more than it was worth, so one night they struck a match to their homeplace and climbed in a covered wagon and headed west.

Put near the first I can recollect is Ike telling me of Us Moons. His memory seemed to stretch clean back to creation. He talked of Jonathan Moon, my first known kin, whats name and farm was all writ up in the Doomsday book like as if they had gone fishing together. "The Moons always took their living rough handed from the earth," Ike said. "No Moon ever lived in any godforsaken city, or any else place but where all the land they could see from their doorsteps belonged to them. They was never a tramping lot. They clung to their homeplaces as long as they could in honor. None of them was ever knighted, on accounta they never went fighting of any wars. They knowed how it was between a man and his homeplace and they was never the ones to drive any man off'n his. Only Moons what ever took up arms was your grandpa and uncles

during the Great Rebellion, and they had to on accounta the Yanks was marching agin their land."

This would be of a night, and I'd be sitting on Ike's lap. If it was winter, afore the kitchen fireplace, but happen it was summer, we'd sit out on the front porch steps. When I'd get sleepy, Ike would shake my chin and wake me up, for it was fitting I heard what he'd say. The Kids would have snuck away to their beds long afore and Em would be red-ding up for the night and My Dad would be in his study reading outa a book, it not mattering for the future of the Moons was in nobuddy's hands but mine.

"No Moons ever worked for other men," Ike would give my chin an extra hard shake when he'd say this, so's there'd be no danger of my missing it. "If they planted a tree, or drove a fence post into the ground, it was for themselves and their children's children and not for some other man and his'n. When your Dad and me first come to the Yellowstone over thirty years gone, we slept in a dugout and et nothing but jackrabbits and doughgods, on accounta we wouldn't join no outfit what wasn't our'n. But look at Moon Manor now! Two thousand acres of the best alfalfa pasturage in the state and racing men from coast to coast coming up to buy our hosses. And here's you, Jonathan Moon, living in a house exactly like what your great-great grandpa built back in Kentucky. Plenty of folks what come to this country same time as your Dad and me are still living in the same soddies they built then, on accounta they was always willing to be working of the railroad, or of somebody better off'n themselves."

"Leave that baby go to bed," Em would come with my night things and comand. "Ten o'clock and him wide awake as an owl."

"Go away, woman!" Ike would start undressing of me then, whether it was on the porch or in the kitchen. It always took him about an hour, so I jest sit still and let him work at me as he talked.

"Everybuddy heard tell of the Sussex Moons. Old Queen Bess herself sent men to learn of them. T'was Jeremy Moon what growed the first potatoes in all England and t'was none less than Sir Francis Drake give him the seed. The Moons ever showed other people the way. T'was

your great-great grandpa Godfry Moon what first saw that the Blue Grass was made for hosses. While up here in the Yellowstone where every man turned his hand to cows, your Dad was smart enough to round up the mustangs off'n the range. That's how we got our start, trading ten wild hosses for one thoroughbred."

Happening we were out on the porch, my Dad woulda been listening at his study window and he'd poke out his head and ask extra serious of Ike, "Wasn't it Thomas Watt Moon what discovered steam and Eli Whitney Moon what invented the cotton gin?"

Soon as I growed a little more bigger I got on to My Dad's joshing and would try it on Ike myself. I'd tell him stories out of Arabian Nights, and Gulliver's Travels and ask if the Moons had ever heard tell or done such. They wasn't no tale I could tell but what he could tell a taller one about Us Moons. This would generally be at the supper table on accounta I liked an audience.

"Give over, Jonathan," My Dad would say when he'd see Ike's imagination was near to split from stretching. "What you mean doubting the abilities of your ancestors?" His voice would be stern like, but there'd be a great twinkle in his eyes. "Jest you go on Ike and tell this young heathen about Christopher Columbus Moon what discovered America."

Ike's woman, Em, was so awed by his tales of Us Moons, that she always treated me like as if I was a crown prince or some such. Afore Ike took her she had been the Linden's hired girl. Karl Linden had sent back to the old country for her on accounta he couldn't get enough work outa American girls. She was big and sleepy eyed, with braids like well ropes wrapped around her head, and she was that strong that when I hid my face agin her big soft breast, I felt that nothing could touch me. Not even death.

Em come to live on Moon Manor after Ike and My Dad built the big white house, and afore she had been there a year the kids come. Folks about were that aggravated, on accounta they couldn't decide who the father was. But Ike didn't keep them long worrit. Soon as ever Doc Sessions said "Twins," he got drunk as a lord and jumped on a hoss and rode so far and so fast to tell everybuddy that his mare dropped dead

beneath him. When he come home he brought Em a pair of pink satin slippers what was too little for her, but he didn't bring no parson. Even My Dad failed of making him marry her. "I done made my promises to Em," Ike said. "Ain't no skyrider going to hear them. Some things is private."

The Twins was named Jonathan and David, same as My Dad and me. But it was too mixing to call them that, so on accounta one being born a half a head taller than the other and they always staying that way, they was called the Big Kid and the Little Kid. The Big Kid was exactly like Ike, full of reasons and that skinny that My Dad said he ate so much it made him thin to carry it around. While the Little Kid was more Em's kind, squat and sturdy and slow thinking. They was always clinging to some part of each other's anotomy, like as if they was Siamese and couldn't come apart no how.

After Ike took up with Em, he kept at My Dad's heels like a barking dog to get him to take a woman. "If you don't get yourself a son what's to become of the Moons?" He worrit My Dad with asking, "Who's my kids going to work for? You want Moon Manor to fall into strange hands after all we sweat and dug?"

My Dad would agree with him, but would never do no more about it than to sit of nights studying the picture in the back of his watch of the girl he'd left behind him back in the Blue Grass. So if Big Melody hadn't sent him to Congres I probably would never of been born, on accounta Washington was where my mother lived. My Dad wanted a mother for his son and she wanted a lover. They was never no peace between them and when My Dad's term of office expired, she was plumb glad to take the money what he give her and to let him take me off to my homeplace.

Nobuddy ever tolt me anything about her, but once I overheard My Dad say to Ike, "I've had another letter from Kathy; she wants me to let her have the boy for the summer."

"Tell her you'll see her in hell first," Ike said awful mad. Don't she know Jonathan is the only Moon left cept you?"

"You can't have a child by a woman and then jest pick up and

leave," My Dad said. "And that's pretty much what I did. Kathy's a fine girl, it makes me feel like a skunk to say no, but the life she would give Jonathan would be death to a Moon."

It didn't bother Ike none that My Dad fetched me home without my mother. He was plumb glad not to have a woman person interfering with how he should bring me up. Us Kid's education was a great concern of Ike's. He taught us to read outa Huntly's "History of the World," the same outa what My Dad had taught him. We never got very far in books though, on accounta Ike never agreeing with them and spending most of the time showing us they was all wrong. My Dad was always threatening to send back east for a tutor, but Us Kids would beg him not, for how could any strange person know so well as Ike what we'd a need to know? "More men what's lived been fools than's not," Ike would say, when we come to an extra disagreeable page. "So a man's got to be careful, or he'll be believing their nonsense. The Moons never set much store by books anyway, they being mostly writ for folks not smart enough to figure things out for themselves."

Both Ike and Em put me afore their own kids, but there was one thing Ike wouldn't learn me no matter how I begged. "Us Wheelers have always fiddled for you Moons," he said, and would go on learning the Big Kid to fiddle while I sulked in the corner. They was no body in our parts what could play the fiddle like Ike. Nights when he took a fiddling fit the tall sage brush along the river bank back of our house was all filled up with our Outfit what had snuck up from the Bunkhouse to listen, and happen a stranger passed on the road he said, "Whoa!" to his team for a spell. His music was awful sad; even when it was happy it was sad, on accounta it made you feel that the happiness had been dearly paid for and might be soon going.

I could never properly decide what I liked best, Ike's fiddling or his singing. He was plumb chuck full of songs. Mostly sad, too. All about homesick cowboys and separated sweethearts and wronged women and such. But the sorrowfullest of all was about a boy what starved to death in the great Irish famine. I recollect that night My Dad had got in late from Sundance and was having a plate of beans at the kitchen table

while Ike was singing this'n. When he got to the part, "Give me three grains of corn, mother, only three grains of corn, t'will keep the little life I have till the coming of the morn," Em and Us Kids was all weeping like as if it was a hoss selling day. "Will these beans put you outa your misery?" My Dad said and then threw a spoonful what landed plunk against Ike's bald head.

"You want your son to grow up a hard hearted losel like yourself?" Ike asked, mad as a wet hen. "Cause you got no feelings, you got no call to discourage them in your son."

Them two was always argufying. My Dad wanted Moon Manor to be modern, but Ike hated machinery. He took a ax and chopped up the first mow what My Dad bought on accounta it cut off a jackrabbit's leg and I recollect well the first time he saw a car.

Him and Us Kids had all been berrying and when we come up outa the river bottom we saw that our hitching posts was all filled up with teams and ponies, and that our big corral fence was lined with neighbors. This often happened; folks heared of something and then come to hear what Ike thought about it. As we come up, Big Melody what was sitting long side of My Dad on the corral gate called out, "Well Parson what's the sermon tonight?"

Big Melody always said this and it always made Ike mad, but this night he didn't answer back on accounta we all had saw the thing. We knowed what it was from the papers, but we was all comfluttered to see one standing right there by our corral like as if it had a right. A city man was sitting on the front seat. Ike walked up to him looking so mad that the City Man put up his fists. Ike turned to My Dad. "You sit there on your goddamned monkey tail and laugh, with a thing like that on your homeplace," Ike said. "David, you're a disgrace to the Moons."

"Drive it around the corral a couple of times, Mr. Kalkins," My Dad said, laughing so he had to put his hands over his heart where the pain always come. "Let Ike see how it goes."

It made a noise like thunder in the Firehole Divide when it moved. Ike dropped the berry pails and lifted Us Kids up to My Dad outa harm's way. The hosses began to scream and kick and one team broke loose

and ran with the buggy right out in our potato patch afore the thing stopped.

"It's a magic wonder the earth don't open right up and swallow such a blasphemous thing," Ike marveled. "It's worse than a train, cause it ain't got no tracks so's you can figure out where it'll go."

"T'would save a hoss a lot of work," My Dad said winking at Big Melody.

"You could go sparking the Merry Widow in Greacewood and be back before Em missed you," Big Melody said, knowing well that Ike never looked at any woman save Em and was always argufying with men what went outa their own homes for such.

Ike paid them no heed. "I'd be mortal shamed to be seen in one riding cross country with all the animals and birds fleeing for their lives."

"They're a thousand times better than a hoss," the City Man said, thinking that on accounta all the men was laughing at Ike they was not for him. "They can do anything."

"Can they rope a steer?" Ike said quick like, and reached out and yanked the City Man outa the thing.

My Dad and Big Melody was laughing so they could scarce pull Ike off'n the City Man. "Best take that thing and get," Big Melody tolt the City Man, looking kind of sheepish on accounta he didn't want Ike to know he had asked the stranger out.

Folks always laughed at Ike, but they didn't often go against what he said. He sized up new comers and tolt what to expect of them and he'd only to look at a piece of land to know what best would grow there. So our country was pretty slow at buying cars. Long after the happening at the corral, car dealers would meet up with the question, "Can they rope steers?"

Every Sunday during the summer, Ike would take us kids on a walk over Moon Manor what would last the whole day through. "You can't know your homeplace too well," Ike would say as we cut off through the fields. "For the land can't really be your'n till you've walked over every inch of it."

T'was at the end of one of these hikes that our first trouble come, so I recollect it well. We started out afore sunup, the dew wetting us to our knees and Ike bending beneath the grub poke and chewing on a stalk of alfalfa. Ike always chewed alfalfa. He said folks missed a lot by not having a hoss's appetite of it.

We left the fields at Saddle Ridge and from there we could see way off, beyond Big Melody's Ten Sleep, the far purple mountains of the Park. Ike pointed out the divide in the highlands, where he and My Dad first saw Moon Manor. "We was glad to get outa the mountains," he said. "They be no ways fitting for a homeplace, for their canyons yawn like open graves and their heights is a torment to the pride of man."

The sun was breath warm on the ridge and Ike stretched out on a sandbar to dry his shoes. The Kids gathered sand lilies and got their noses all yellow from the deep smells they took. I walked a spell higher. Below the purple alfalfa moved in the breeze and half choked me with its sweet stinging smell. The big white house and the corrals seemed as growed to the earth as the cottonwoods what shaded them. Frail colored mists hung over the river what was overfull with June meltings. Across it in the pale green stretches of pasture, the young hosses had set themselves agin the mornglome and from the earth I felt the heavy thud of heir feet. The ridge showed me my homeplace, and a meadow lark put a tune to what I saw.

"Look good to you, Jonathan?" Ike come up and put his hand on my shoulder. "Men worshipped the earth afore they growed blasphemous and invented God." Ike pointed to the highway beyond the Manor what was dotted here and there with buggies. "Whole Yellowstone is turning out to church, and in strange parts other men are doing the same. They will shut themselves up in a house with windows made of glass what they can't see outa, and they'll read outa a book what's all about some god what was always hurting poor folks just to show them how strong he was. Ain't no need trying to make sense of it."

The Kids had got so far ahead in their lily hunt that we had to run to catch up with them. At the foot of the ridge we come on a thicket a buffalo berries, and we all broke off branches an et from them as we

walked. Afore noon we was come to Bitter Creek and the old soddy what Ike and My Dad had put up their first year in the Yellowstone. Ike lifted us each up to read the faint printing of "Moon Manor" above the door, what My Dad had scratched on so long ago with a piece of red sandstone. "Folks laughed," Ike said. "They said as how Moon Manor was a mighty high sounding name for such diggings, but they be laughing outa the other sides of their mouths now."

There wasn't any windows and only one door, and inside the air was damp like a cave. Hundreds of little lives lived in the walls, and the spiders were that many that between one week and the next we had to break their webs between the table and the chairs. Ike built a smudge in the fireplace to scare out everything, and then we all went down to the creek and stript and went in.

The creek was too shallow for Ike to do much swimming, so he found himself a clay bed, where the water was only a few inches deep, and laid down. After a spell I left the Kids yelling at magpies what was sitting in the cottonwoods mocking us and waded over and joined him. The clay was as soft and smooth as Em's bosom when she had on her black satin dress. I stretched myself as far as I could in it. The warm live water ebbing up between my armpits and legs and the little threads of moss what drifted agin my skin and clung made me conscious of my body. I was all flesh like a pig in a pasture ditch. I liked it.

Rinsing ourselves off, but not bothering with cloths yet, we went back to the soddy and made us a snack. We had roast apples and potatoes and broiled beef strips, and we et so much Ike said he could see our bellies swelling up like bloated cows. Food always set Ike to recollecting. He tolt us happenings of the Yellowstone what made us mad with jealousy at being born so late.

Our shadows was long like as if we had stilts when we started out. The Kids ran ahead and filled their pockets with isinglass until they come to the coolie where the tall sage growed, and then they waited for us. I knowed why they waited. They was scairt.

"I was only a little tad no bigger than you, Jonathan," Ike said, shouldering the tall sage brush aside so we could pass. "I was down

here hunting our milk cow when I runs on their camp. They was after the corral full of mustangs what your Dad had spent all summer wrangling, and knowing we was all alone felt safe to camp right on our land. In the morning while one of them woulda shot your Dad and me, the others woulda made off with the hosses.

"I knowed they was the famous Rabbit Rustlers as soon as I saw them. Folks called them that on accounta they never give a man they robbed a rabbit's chance afore they kilt him. I ran back and tolt your Dad, but all he could do was to clean his guns and wait for dark, help being so far it was outa the question. So soon as it was good and black we snuck out, leaving the lantern still burning as though we was all unknowing in the soddy. We made a wide circle of their camp and come up on them from behind. All four a them was sitting round their camp-fire swapping yarns. We was in ten yards of them afore your Dad started to shoot. He shot so fast that only one a them had time to draw his gun afore they was all dead.

"It took us all night to dig their grave, but as soon as we could we took their hosses and outfit into Sundance and turned them over to Big Melody who was sheriff then. Your Dad said he found the rustler's outfit running loose in the hills. Big Melody knowed he was lying and tried to get him to own up, on accounta he thought your Dad should have the five thousand dollar reward what the government offered for them dead or alive, but your Dad went right on saying he didn't know nothing about nothing and he'd jest found the hosses loose in the hills."

We was all standing around the bare sunken spot where the tall sage wouldn't grow, while Ike talked. He fished in his jumper for his handkerchief and wiped the wet from his eyes, and his voice was all choky when he went on. "Your Dad was never properly proud of this piece of work. Years after I'd hear him talking in his sleep about it, but he'd no call to let it hurt his happiness. Without the money what the mustangs fetched, he'd not been able to fence Moon Manor, and the squatters woulda took it away from him. A man's got a right to fight for his homeplace, and land what is held at the price of blood grows dearer to the heart. Any Moon woulda done what he done."

Ike had always a hard time to leave that place and this day Us Kids had to pull him along. He was glum all the way over the hills and cross the river on the highway bridge till we come to the pastures and the hosses started whinnying to him. They come running from all parts, and crowded round him like as if he was one of them. Us Kids couldn't see him at all, but we heared the denim of his pockets rip as they nosed for sugar. Ike tolt us each to get on while they was all crowded up agin the fence, and when we did he swung up on Hannibal, the best bid of the year, and we all started off barebacked across the pastures with the unmounted hosses tagging like dogs behind.

The hard pressure of the young mare's back between my legs and the wind whipping down my shirt front and cross my bare body made me feel more than a man. The sky seemed only a step from the earth, and I thought any moment I would rise to it, and I thought that the feel of the redgold clouds must be even grander than the wind, and I thought that the sun teetering on the tip of Troll Peak was a ripe apple for me to pick as I passed.

The scairt howl of a dog what smelt death come to us cross the river from the house. Ike was off'n Hannibal as soon as it reached his ears and running for the bridge and shouting back for Us Kids to follow. We saw Doc Session's hoss in the corral and knowed that it meant My Dad. For years the Doc had been telling him to mind his heart, but My Dad always answered, "To hell with it. If it can't beat strong enough for a man then the sooner it stops the better."

Em was at the door to hurry us up the stairs to My Dad's room. Doc Sessions was bending over the bed. "There's life in him," he said to Ike, "but it won't be there long."

"He was pitching hoss shoes with the Outfit down behind the bunkhouse," Em said, rolling her apron into a ball. "And all at onct he jest toppled over and they had to fetch him in."

I pushed pass the grownups so I could see My Dad. His eyes was shut, but his forehead and cheeks peering outa his heavy white hair and beard showed dark red and the quilt scarce moved with his breath.

"Come here, Jonathan," Ike knelt by the bed and pulled me down

with him. Em and the Kids stood behind us. There wasn't any place for the Doc, so he went to the door and turned his back. Snige started howling agin. "That goddamned dog," Ike said.

My Dad's eyes opened at Ike's voice and moved back and forth between us till they understood. Then a great twinkle come in them, like as always when he talked to Ike. "Don't forget to look after the Moons," he said, his body sort of straightening out.

We looked at My Dad for a long time. Then Ike got up and pulled the sheet over My Dad's face, and it seemed like as if he ought to have pulled something over the purple gray of the sky and over the hills and fields, what was growing more beautiful in the glome. None of us was like I had ever knowed us, but outside the watery roar of the Shoshone hadn't so much as quivered, and the hosses went right on playing in the pastures. It made me mad. Em come up and put her hand on my hair. "Don't you feel bad, Jonathan," she said. "You'll see your Dad some day in a much better world than this'n."

"Don't lie to him!" Ike grabbed me fiercely from Em. "He shan't be comforted by lies! Jonathan, your Dad is dead. What's happened to all the people in other years has happened to him, and it will one day happen to you. He's dead and he'll stay that way, and them that says different ain't got the guts to say the truth. But he had a grand life and he'd no kick coming. Don't let me hear none outa you."

"I ain't kicking," I said. "Only I don't want the sky to be so fine, I don't--"

"The earth can't change on accounta one man has died," Ike said. "Not even him," and he held me close.

That night after they had dressed My Dad up in his Sunday suit, and carried him down to the parlor lounge to wait for the coffin what Big Melody and the Outfit was making out in the back yard, Ike took me in where My Dad was and closed the door. He lifted down the great scythe what hung above the fireplace, what had belonged to Roland Moon the Strong, and handed it to me. Then he went into My Dad's study and fetched the iron chestfull of earth, what Peter Moon had brought outa Sussex two hundred and fifty years before. "A scythe and a bit of earth," Ike

said. "These be your inheritance from the Moons. They had gold and jewels like other men, but t'was these they saw fit to hand down to their sons and their sons' sons. They be yours now, Jonathan. Mind you keep faith with them as honorably as your Dad."

We buried My Dad up on Saddle Ridge, where he'd often said all the Moon Manor dead was to lie. There was no parson, no nothing jest us and Big Melody. Ike took a pinch of earth from the iron chest and flung it into the open grave. "You and me wouldn't be worth that," he said, as he lifted me up in the buggy for going home.

Them two had always quarreled, My Dad laughing and Ike in tears, but now that My Dad was up on the Ridge, he belonged to the Moons; the very best best of the lot and Ike almost forgot the others in remembering him. Moon Manor ran on, jest like as if My Dad was still with us. No problem ever come up but what Ike couldn't recollect something My Dad had said what would solve it. We was almost getting happy again, the autumn earth not letting us be sad, and then she come.

Ike was fiddling for us in the kitchen so we never heard her car on the road, or her knock at the door. We jest looked up and saw her peering through the screen door at us. She wore a yellow dress and hat and with the night behind her, she looked like as if she had jest stepped outa the moon. "I'm David's wife," she said as Ike bid her come in.

She came and stood on our kitchen hearth and shook the dust from her clothes. Her big black eyes searched me outa behind Em's chair. "So you are Jonathan," she said and come and pushed my hair outa my eyes. I felt her studying every inch of me. "Thank God you're a Coniston," she said, meaning her own people.

"He ain't, he's a Moon!" Ike fair snatched me from her.

His madness didn't scare her a bit, she jest looked at him cool like and said, "You are Ike, aren't you? I remember David talking about you. Why wasn't I notified of his death? I learned of it quite by chance. A friend of mine summered in the Park and wrote me of it, so I came at once for my son."

"You ain't got no son what I know of," Ike said holding me behind him. "You sold him to David for money! I know cause he tolt me so."

"I was a very young girl then," she said, and the angry red in her cheeks made her look like the lady on the Bank of Cheyenne calendar. "I had made an unhappy marriage, I wanted to forget it, and I thought that by giving up my son I could live again as though nothing had ever happened. But I couldn't. David knew I couldn't. I wrote him time after time and begged him for my son."

"What you aim to do now?" Ike said.

"Why, take my son," she said. "And give him the life that belongs to him."

"Jonathan belongs to Moon Manor," Ike said.

"I've had enough of ranchmen," she said. "I shan't have one for my son. Jonathan's education will be expensive. My lawyer will dispose of the ranch for me."

"I'm pretty much alive," Ike said, "and afore you could do that I'd have to be dead. Moon Manor belongs to Jonathan and Jonathan belongs to it. Ain't nothing going to separate them! Never!"

"Now don't be foolish," she said. "You have no lawful right to him. David never left a will. I found that out at the bank in Sundance; and we were never divorced. I'm the child's mother and no law court in the world would take him from me,"

"Damn the law," Ike said. "A man's got a right to fight for his homeplace. Jonathan ain't big enough, but he's got me."

"If you were capable of reason," she said, "I could talk to you."

"An if you was a man I could talk to you." Ike let go of me and reached for his gun what hanged on the door, handy for hawks and coyotes. He didn't point it at her, but held it down at his side. "You'd better go," he said.

She looked at him and laughed and then turned to me like as if she never cared what he had in his hand. She took a handkerchief outa her bag what was softer than anything I ever felt, and wiped my face with it. "I'm your mother," she said, "and God only knows what they've told you about me." Then she tipped my chin up to kiss me, but I drawed back and went and sit on the milk bench with the Kids. I didn't like nobuddy what Ike didn't.

"You understand who she is, Jonathan? You understand what she wants?" Ike waited for me to nod my head afore he went on. "Then tell her how it strikes you."

"I shan't give him a chance to say something to his mother, that he will be sorry for afterwards." She took holt of my hand tight and drew me off'n the bench. "You're coming with me now. I should never feel safe to leave you here with this man another night."

"You got the law on your side. I ain't fool enough not to know that. And if I was a man what was feared of it, you could do all you say and I'd stand by and let you. Only I ain't!" Ike pointed the gun square at her now. "But you ain't got no law with you here tonight. Take your hands off'n that boy and get!"

"You'd never dare," she said and kept holt my hand. "You'd hang for it."

"Not if I turned it on myself afterwards," Ike said.

"You'd never dare," she said again, and took a step towards the door pulling me with her. "If I didn't know how faithfully you'd worked for David all these years, I'd have you arrested as soon as I get to Sundance," she said, getting braver on accounta he didn't answer her.

She had me almost to the door when the shot come, and when she fell she pulled me down with her. The blood spouted like a little spring from the bosom of her yellow dress. I snatched my hand away and stood up. I looked at Ike and was afraid to go to him, so I ran to where Em and the Kids crouched in the dining room doorway screaming. Ike turned to us and waved the gun like as if it was a whip. "Go upstairs, you all! Go!" he said.

"Maybe she ain't dead," Em said, "Maybe Big Melody can help us."

"I took you off'n Karl Linden because you was smart," Ike said. "Now take the Kids outa here. Quick!"

We was half way up the stairs when the second shot come, and we turned and ran back to the kitchen. Ike lay on the hearth rug, its bright colors growing brighter with his blood. Em sit on the floor and took his head in her lap, and the Kids tugged at his boots.

I walked to the screen door, past her body, and stood studying my

homeplace. The northern lights was playing green and red across the pale stubbles of the alfalfa fields, and for half a minute I saw the mound of My Dad's grave up on Saddle Ridge. Then the lights moved on to the river, coloring it like the spreading red on the floor. "Land what is held at the price of blood grows dearer to the heart." Ike had once said, and I looked, and knowed he was right.

MR. AND MRS. CRAGHORN

by

Roderick Lull

IN the morning they got up at five and washed in water that was so cold they couldn't make the soap lather. Their room was under one of the eaves, and it was cold too, and they felt their skins turning blue as soon as they got out of bed. After they had washed they dressed, putting their thick turtleneck sweaters over their heavy woolen shirts, and went downstairs.

"We'll probably get fired right away," Bob said while they were going down. "We don't know anything about this kind of work."

"That's all right," Jack said. "When you work for a dollar a day and board they don't expect you to know anything." Bob laughed and they went down to the kitchen without saying any more about it.

The halls and stairs were like the rooms, very cold, but the kitchen was bright and warm. A great fire was burning in the iron stove and Mrs. Craghorn was standing in front of it, cooking. Mr. Craghorn hadn't come down yet. Mrs. Craghorn was a tall, rather slim woman of about thirty-five, with sleek dark hair and black sparkling eyes. She was the best looking farm woman he had ever seen, Jack thought.

When they came in Mrs. Craghorn turned and nodded and they said "Good morning." They stood around for a minute, wondering what to do, then sat down at the bare yellow table. After a while Mrs. Craghorn put some eggs and bacon and toast on two tin plates and brought them over to the table.

Jack said, "Thank you," and Mrs. Craghorn nodded again. Just as she got back to the stove her husband came in. He was shorter than she, and about ten years older. His head was bald and shaped like an egg. Jack said "Good morning" to him too, and he grunted without answering.

No one talked during breakfast. When it was over Mr. Craghorn

said, "I guess I'll put you two fellows to work making fence," and they said all right.

Mrs. Craghorn was eating her breakfast now, but she put her fork down. "You better have one of them fix the car," she said. "The one that said he knew about cars."

"I want them to help me on the fence," Mr. Craghorn said.

"One of them had better fix the car," Mrs. Craghorn said.

Mr. Craghorn didn't answer for a minute. He had his hands in his pocket and was staring at the floor. He hadn't shaved, and his chin was dark and rough. "All right," he said, and Mrs. Craghorn smiled. Then he said. "Well, come on," and they went out of the house.

They shivered inside their woolen shirts and sweaters as soon as the cold air struck them. The sun was a pale cold yellow in the sky, and the light was a strange disagreeable grey. It made the house look very shabby and in need of a good coat of paint. Over to the left the orchard stretched away, the trees gaunt and angular and lonely-looking.

Mr. Craghorn said, "You'll find the car in the barn. I guess I told you yesterday what I think's wrong with it. It's in pretty bad shape. If you need any parts come over and tell me and I'll see what I can do."

Jack said "Okay," and walked toward the barn. He glanced back and nodded at Bob who was walking a little behind Mr. Craghorn. Bob grinned and waved his hand and made a grimace. Jack laughed and went on to the barn.

He rolled back the door of the barn and lifted up the hood of the car. Then he started it and listened to the motor. The bearings were loose and the valves knocked and something was wrong with the timing. There were a lot of tools on a bench and he began to work on the car, pulling the radiator and the head and finally taking off the carburetor because it got in his way. After a while he began to feel warm and he removed his sweater and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt.

He worked for a couple of hours, dismantling the car, and then he stopped and lit a cigarette. He stood in the doorway looking out toward the fields. He saw two tiny figures in the distance. They were Bob and Mr. Craghorn. He thought that if it hadn't been for Mrs. Craghorn he

would be with them making fence. He felt thankful that she had insisted on fixing the car. He rather enjoyed working with motors, even cheap broken-down ones. It was a hell of a lot better than making fence, anyway.

While he was standing there, smoking, Mrs. Craghorn came out of the house. She walked toward him. When she got close to the barn she said, "I thought you came here to work," in her low, not unpleasant voice.

"Yes," he said.

Mrs. Craghorn said, "Well, then?"

"I just stopped a minute," he said. "You can't work all the time on motors. It's hard on the back."

Mrs. Craghorn smiled. "You'll harden," she said, and he said, "Maybe I will." He dropped the cigarette, stepped on it, and went back to the car. He bent over the motor and began working delicately with the ignition wires. He was aware that she was still standing in the doorway looking at him. The shadow she made fell across the haystrewn floor of the barn a few feet away. The shadow was long and crooked and incredibly thin.

When he looked up again she was smiling at him. "Don't work too hard," she said and walked away. He watched her until she had entered the house. Then he went on with his work.

Just after twelve she came out of the house again with three small pails. She left one at the entrance to the barn and walked on. "Lunch," she said over her shoulder. He went to the door and picked up the pail and took it back to the car and sat down on the running board. In the little pail were two thick meat sandwiches and an apple. He ate slowly, and by the time he had finished Mrs. Craghorn had reached the barn again on her way back to the house. She stood just outside and stared for a long time into his eyes. Then she laughed and went on to the house without speaking.

He was glad, for some obscure reason, when she had passed out of his sight. He had the motor completely torn down and he began working on the valves. They were in bad shape, misshapen from the heat and thick with carbon. He wondered how Bob was getting along; Bob wasn't accustomed to hard work outdoors and it would tell on him.

He had finished three of the exhaust valves when Mr. Craghorn came into the barn.

"How's she coming?" Mr. Craghorn said.

"All right," Bob said. "It'll take time."

"You don't have to do too much to it," Mr. Craghorn said. "Anything to make it go for a while."

"I might as well fix it as good as I can while I'm at it," Jack said. "It won't take much longer."

Mr. Craghorn came over and watched him without saying anything. Jack went on cleaning the valves. He wished he had the proper equipment; it seemed rather a shame to have to do a second-rate job when he was able to do a good one, merely because he lacked the right tools.

After a while he heard a car coming along the short dirt road that ran between the house and the highway and he looked up. It was a big car, clean and shining. It stopped near the front porch. A big man wearing a tweed suit got out and went up the steps. He knocked on the door and after a minute he went in.

"Somebody calling," Jack said.

"Never mind," Mr. Craghorn said.

Jack reached in his pocket for a cigarette. He was all out. He showed the empty pack to Mr. Craghorn.

"Got an extra one?" he asked.

Mr. Craghorn said, "No, I don't smoke cigarettes."

"I've got some in my room," Jack said. "I forgot to bring them."

Mr. Craghorn's narrow face had a serious, intent expression. "Go on working," he said.

"I work better when I can smoke," Jack said. "It'll only take a minute."

"I said to go on working," Mr. Craghorn said. "I didn't hire you to smoke."

"Maybe you thought that on a dollar a day I wouldn't be able to smoke," Jack said.

"You're wasting time," Mr. Craghorn said. He backed away from the car. "I can get all the men I want for a dollar a day now."

That was true, Jack thought. That was the hell of it. If they didn't

want to pay anything they didn't have to, and if they wanted to act like you were a slave they could do that too and get away with it. He thought that he would like to smash Mr. Craghorn's face. He would like to change the face's expression. Then he laughed. Mr. Craghorn didn't mean anything to him. He was just a port in a storm, and a cheap, second-rate port at that. He didn't mean anything. He thought that a good-looking woman like Mrs. Craghorn must get pretty damned sick of seeing him around.

"Okay," Jack said "It's your show."

"Yes," Mr. Craghorn said. He waited a while longer, until Jack had finished the exhaust valves. Then he went out of the barn without speaking again. He walked very slowly, his shoulders bent, as if he had done a big day's work and was tired out.

Jack waited until he had almost reached the fence. Then he put the tools down and went to the house. He opened the door quietly and went in. He heard soft voices in the living room, and the door was open, but he didn't pause. He went upstairs and got his cigarettes out of his suit and lit one. He stood in the bare room for a minute and smoked. Then he went downstairs.

Just before he reached the bottom of the stairs he looked through the living room door and saw Mrs. Craghorn and the man in the tweed suit. They were sitting on a couch and the man was kissing her. He had blue eyes and thin blond hair and he looked like a prosperous small-town business man. Jack stood very still, watching them. When the man moved his head away Mrs. Craghorn saw him.

Jack and Mrs. Craghorn looked at each other for a long time. Then she laughed her peculiar low-pitched laugh. She got indolently off the couch and walked over to the door, the man following her. She said, "Hello, there."

"Hello," Jack said, and Mrs. Craghorn laughed again. The big man laughed too and put his arm around her waist. She leaned very close to him.

The big man said, "Who's this, Emma?"

"Just a young fellow who's working for us." Mrs. Craghorn said.

"Not a bad young fellow. I think I like him."

"Sure," the big man said. He smiled and showed his large white even teeth. "He's all right."

Jack said, "I'm sorry I butted in."

"That's all right," Mrs. Craghorn said. "It doesn't matter. You're not like the rest of these hicks that work around here."

"No," Jack said.

"You went to college, didn't you?" Mrs. Craghorn said.

Jack said, "Yes."

Mrs. Craghorn laughed again. "I can see that you're a smart young man." Then she said, "Are you still working on the car?"

"Yes," Jack said.

"I thought so," Mrs. Craghorn said. "I didn't think he'd put you to work anywhere else when I wanted the car fixed."

The big man laughed heartily. "No," he said. He kissed Mrs. Craghorn quickly, as if he had forgotten Jack.

Jack said, "I'll be getting back."

"See you later," Mrs. Craghorn said smiling.

"Yes." He felt her eyes on him as he left the house. He knew she was looking at him as surely as if he could see her.

Mr. Craghorn was waiting for him at the barn. He was leaning against the door, chewing a straw.

"I thought I told you not to go to the house." Mr. Craghorn said.

"Sure you did," Jack said. "That's just what you told me."

"And you disobeyed me?"

"Sure," Jack said. "Sure I did."

Mr. Craghorn breathed sharply. He wasn't looking at Jack. He was looking at the big shiny car that was drawn up near the house. "I could fire you, you know," he said. "I could let you go and you'd have a hard time finding another job."

Jack didn't say anything.

Mr. Craghorn chewed on the straw a minute longer. Then he turned away and started back toward the fence. "Keep on working now," he said. "Don't waste any more time."

"Maybe not," Jack said. "Maybe I won't."

He didn't go to work until Mr. Craghorn was half a mile away. Then he began to reinstall the cleaned valves. But after a minute he stopped and sat down on the running board. He lit a cigarette. He sat there for a long time, thinking of Mrs. Craghorn and her big black eyes and the way she had looked at him.

A SHORT WALK

by

Leane Zugsmith

EVERY afternoon at five o'clock they all sat around the dining-room table for tea: English fashion. Today the Herr Professor Langer, who was always cracking the knuckles of his long pale hands, smiled as if he knew a secret. Opposite him sat Frau Langer, clapping the wadded silk cover over the tea pot; taking it off; emptying the residue from some one's cup of tea into a little pewter bowl; refilling the cup; gasping when her cruel corset pushed at her heavy breasts.

Little Gerda, wearing the Herr Professor's long nose and knobby forehead on her twelve-year-old face, sat next to her father. She was the Langer's only child, an arrival after ten years of unproductivity. She was indulged in most of her desires, among them complete access to her father's library. From his books she had learned more epigrams than knowledge and she was inclined to quote the more sophisticated ones to the Herr Professor's visitors. Overhearing her, the Herr Professor would say "Gerd Schon! Gerd Schon!" in a kind of silly surprise, while the appalled guests would pretend they had not understood.

Next to Gerda sat Fraulein Pfeiffer, the Herr Professor's secretary and the little girl's tutor, one of the family; she had been with the Langers for eight years, ever since she had been twenty-one. Very quiet, very capable, very agreeable, she was a pallid little thing, with ashen hair smoothly and badly worn, low-lashed porcelain-blue eyes, colorless lips from which her teeth slightly protruded.

Finally there would be another member of the daily tea party: Frieda, who laid the cloth, brought in the tea things, brewed the tea, too, with her healthy red hands. She sang all day at her work, in the kitchen, in the bedrooms, even in the bathroom: "*A-a-ach! welche Lust, Sol-dat zu zein!*" She was only seventeen but already her full ruddy cheeks, her

strong arms, her hearty giggle, attracted youths. Frieda, too, sat down and drank tea with the family—English fashion.

As each sipped his steaming cup of tea and milk, there was a silence as if they all knew that outside the slippery cold was bitter and treacherous but that they were all secure in a fort of warmth, friendliness, hot tea, the great blocks of sugared *stolle*, that Frau Langer was slicing, and that life had its moments, too, for next week the Herr Professor was taking his wife and daughter, together with his protege, young Wilhelm Moeller, instructor in the philosophy department at the University to—no less!—a philosophical congress at Amsterdam.

But Gerda broke the silence. "*Dans l'amour*—" she began, her eyes mischievously seeking Fraulein Pfeiffer's.

The little thing blushed. "Please, Gerda," she pleaded faintly. Frieda giggled.

"Gerdschön," said Frau Langer in affectionate reproof and then she looked fondly at the crimson Fraulein Pfeiffer. Just like one of the family, she was; and Frau Langer would have liked nothing better than to see Wilhelm Moeller marry Fraulein Pfeiffer. Who knew? Five times he had taken her home from church. Several times, when he had come to the house, he had been seen talking with interest to her. If Gerdschön, a child, should notice his attentions, maybe it meant something.

"So!" exclaimed the Herr Professor, smiling enormously. "So! Perhaps you do not want to know my news?"

"We do, Professor Langer," said Fraulein Pfeiffer gratefully.

"News? Tell us, Emil," said Frau Langer.

"A little surprise," he said, cracking his knuckles. "First, there is going to be a philosophical congress at Amsterdam for three days, beginning Tuesday a week. Are we all agreed to that?"

"Yes, yes," said every one in chorus.

"Second. Of those leaving from Frankfort for the congress, there are Professor Langer, Frau Langer, Fraulein Gerda Langer, and Herr Wilhelm Moeller. Are we all agreed to that?"

"Yes, yes."

"You are wrong!" he said triumphantly. "There will be another."

He looked at them searchingly.

"Another?" inquired Frau Langer. "Is Jacob going, after all?"

"Not Jacob, not Jacob, but our little Fraulein Pfeiffer," replied the Herr Professor. "I have decided to take her as a Christmas present. Perhaps she will do a little work for me, help me with my speeches; but on the whole it is just a holiday—as a present for a holiday."

"Professor Langer!" cried Fraulein Pfeiffer, purple with pleasure. "I—ach, how can I thank you?"

"No, no." He held up a kind hand. "There is no thanks. You will enjoy it. That is my thanks."

Everyone laughed, everyone was pleased. And Frau Langer could not help reverting to her former speculation as to Wilhelm Moeller and Fraulein Pfeiffer, in a strange city, seeing her brought along just like one of the family, who knew?

Fraulein Pfeiffer lay between the cold clean sheets of the strange bed and listened to Gerda's light sighs as she slept. Sleep was not possible for Fraulein Pfeiffer; too much had happened. There had been the wonderful ride on the train; the night they spent in Paris where they had seen Madame Ida Rubenstein in *La Dame Aux Camellias* at the Odeon ("Trash, trash," Professor Langer had said, cracking his knuckles, "but it will divert the ladies.")

On the way back to their Paris hotel, Wilhelm Moeller had walked with her.

"A woman like Camille does not excite my admiration even in the theatre which is her only sphere," he said. "In the world proper, what is her relation? As a part of the family unit she is negative and therefore does not exist."

"Yes, Herr Moeller, you are right. If all women were like Camille, the family would not exist," said Fraulein Pfeiffer, and she felt herself blush.

"The race would end," said Wilhelm Moeller with emphasis. "But thank the good God there are still left women of substance, sturdy and

capable of continuing the family."

It had, she thought blissfully now as she lay between the clean cold sheets, amounted almost to a declaration. It almost coincided with the day dreams she had been permitting herself of late—but not when they interfered with the Herr Professor's work—in which Wilhelm Moeller did not just take her home from church or talk to her at the Herr Professor's house, but in which Wilhelm Moeller formally asked her to take a walk with him. They would walk down to the bank of the Main and he would define the ideal woman, the ideal wife... but Fraulein Pfeiffer would not dream beyond that. Now she must go to sleep for the next day there was much to be done. In between listening to the addresses, helping the Herr Professor prepare his, looking after little Gerda, she hoped to manage at least two hours in the museum, one of which to be spent in contemplation of the wonderful *The Night Watch*.

The next two days, Fraulein Pfeiffer had almost never a free moment. The Herr Professor, after hearing Dr. Vonez's address, threw away the one he had planned and, with his secretary's assistance, formulated a new one which would so answer the Portugese scholar that he would be silenced for good. Although she only managed to spend half an hour in the museum, Fraulein Pfeiffer was not sad. Philosophical scholars from all over the world, from the United States, from Spain, from Denmark, everywhere, were in Amsterdam for the Congress. To hear them was a wonderful opportunity to improve the mind, even to see them. Little Gerda did not fully appreciate.

"They hurt my eyes," she told Fraulein Pfeiffer. "They are all so unbeautiful, their foreheads are too high."

"One does not notice the physical aspects of human beings whose minds are imposing," said Fraulein Pfeiffer solemnly. Then she blushed, for a picture of Wilhelm Moeller in his new Homburg hat was suddenly before her.

"But their wives have not imposing minds," insisted little Gerda. "Why must they look the way they do? They keep me from eating."

"Gerdschön!" said Fraulein Pfeiffer in the same tone of affectionate reproof that Frau Langer used. But she was grateful that little Gerda had noticed her blush. "Then there are—" She stopped, thinking it wiser not even to bring to little Gerda's attention the two daughters of the professor from the American university. She did not approve of them. Highly, indeed, Fraulein Pfeiffer disapproved of them. She had observed them whispering together during important addresses delivered by great intellectuals. She had seen them ridiculing some of their fellow guests at dinner. They were perhaps pleasing to look at and she supposed some men, *roués*, would consider beautiful the older one with the red hair who smoked cigarettes. As for herself, she had known at once that they represented the type called "flapper" in the United States, very pretty, self-possessed, fashionably costumed, but without brains or, worse, stability.

"Zwei Sellen und ein Gendanke, zwei Herzen und ein Schlag," sang little Gerda, watching Fraulein Pfeiffer with bright greedy eyes.

"Now, Gerdschön," said Fraulein Pfeiffer absently. It made her positively indignant to see some of the professors almost flirt with the two American daughters. As for those girls, coquetting with unaccompanied husbands, it merely showed that they had no values, the sanctity of married life was nothing to them. With a shudder, Fraulein Pfeiffer realized that, if those girls married, they would be just the same and probably faithless—a strong word, but they gave indications of it!—faithless to their husbands.

Perhaps American men were used to it. She had read that women ruled in the United States. The men slaved all day to make money so that their women were provided with luxuries and the women, in return, were—faithless! Somehow this lurid picture came to her mind every time she saw the two daughters. Each time, it was also comforting to banish the picture with the recognition that there existed men like Wilhelm Moeller to whom these girls must seem a pair of Camilles. She hoped that he was not irritated by them.

To top all the excitement, on the third and last night, the big banquet was to take place. Afterwards they were all to ride to a hall where five professors, among them the Herr Professor Langer, would read

their most important papers to the assembly.

For this occasion, Fraulein Pfeiffer had saved the red taffeta dress that she had had made especially for the visit. Frau Langer's seamstress had copied it from a model in a Parisian fashion book and added, as her own touch, a little round collar and cuffs of white organdy. Fraulein Pfeiffer felt almost daring in it, as she walked towards the dining-room with little Gerda and the professor and his wife. She did not expect any of the guests to notice it; she knew that, to them, she was just the Herr Professor's secretary, but Wilhelm might notice it. He was so accustomed to seeing her in dark serviceable clothes that surely he would see something different about her, even though his unobservant eyes might not relate it to the dress. She felt excited, although she knew that to attach importance to a dress was not worthy of one who moved in intellectual circles.

And, indeed, when she caught Wilhelm's eyes and bowed a good-evening to him, she thought he looked puzzled. It was the dress! There was something to be said for the sort of feminine devices that French writers devoted so much of their time to in romances.

But the two young American girls really created a sensation when they walked into the dining-room. The wives actually forgot themselves and whispered. The professors stared almost rudely. Fraulein Pfeiffer made no comment, although little Gerda clucked audibly with her tongue.

Fraulein Pfeiffer felt embarrassed for the two young ladies; she was even embarrassed because they were not. Their evening gowns were so inappropriate, the backs cut so low, the skirts so theatrically long. They looked like actresses and certainly they were painted, their lips were unnaturally red. At the same time, one could not avoid admitting that they were very wonderful to see. It was too bad that they were so out of place in a serious gathering. They should have been in some fast Berlin night club; that was where they should have been.

Although embarrassed, although almost pitying, Fraulein Pfeiffer could not prevent her gaze from returning to them again and again. It was the same with everyone there. Every time she looked at the girls and pulled herself away, she encountered other pairs of eyes doing the same thing.

But this lasted only during the banquet. Once at the hall, Fraulein Pfeiffer forgot about the two American girls and gave herself up to the pleasure of hearing read those weighty papers that were real contributions to the intellectual life of the world. The German and French papers, even the English, were not lingual burdens for her. The Dutch one she had difficulty in following at all; but the Spanish one she conquered by making notes of the words she did not understand, so that she could look them up in her German-Spanish dictionary on the train ride back to Frankfort.

By eleven-thirty the papers had all been read. There was a great buzz of conversation.

"I had better take Gerda right back to the hotel, hadn't I, Frau Langer?" whispered Fraulein Pfeiffer, who did not want to antagonize Gerd Schön by reminding her that she had been permitted to stay up far past her bedtime for this august gathering.

"Yes, Fraulein Pfeiffer, if you will. We shall stay here for a while. There are a few points that the Herr Professor wants to clear up tonight since we take the early train tomorrow."

Little Gerda must have been tired, for she went to bed without any comments on the evening. But although Fraulein Pfeiffer felt that she, too, should be weary, she tossed in bed and not one of the efforts of her will could make her feel that sleep was even near.

A bold thought came to her. She would dress. She would get a breath of air; that would surely put her to sleep. If she walked four times up and down before the hotel—no further, for she did not trust Amsterdam streets at this time of night—surely she would become sleepy.

The thought was bold but at the same time harmless, she reasoned with herself as she dressed. As long as she did not go beyond the facade of the hotel, nothing would happen to her, whereas the bit of exercise would surely put her to sleep.

Once in front of the hotel, she walked with head down, carefully counting the turns. At the fourth, she took a deep breath and entered the hotel.

The front lobby was deserted, just as it had been when she went

out. But now the lift was no longer running. It occurred to her that if she went up the second staircase in the back lobby, she would be nearer her room once she had climbed to the fourth floor. Yes, going through to the back lobby would be preferable to walking through the fourth floor corridor where bedroom doors might suddenly open and all sorts of sinister things happen.

When she reached the archway of the back lobby, she stopped.

There, at the foot of the staircase, stood Wilhelm Moeller and the two American girls in their long, wonderful, vulgar dresses. Fraulein Pfeiffer hardly breathed. The red-haired—one the ones that roués might think beautiful—stood next to Wilhelm Moeller, her hand on his arm, her face tilted up to his. The younger one stood a little to the side, watching them with an impudent smile.

"Why don't you try to kiss me *now*?" cried the red-haired one in her confident American voice.

Without replying, Wilhelm Moeller looked down into her face. He made a quick movement and gathered her into his arms. He crushed his mouth into hers. Then he let the red-haired girl go. His face was grim and fierce. Fraulein Pfeiffer had never before seen a like expression on his face. Then he clapped his hat on his head, turned his back, and mounted the stairs.

Almost before he was out of sight, the two girls burst into giggles.

"Oh, oh, oh," laughed the younger one right up the scale.

"Did you see? Did you see?" cried the red-haired one, shaking with laughter, "the way his little hat sailed away on his head when he went up the stairs? Oh, these German hats!"

"These German neckers!" shouted the younger one, and laughed more.

Fraulein Pfeiffer did not wait to hear more. Carefully she tiptoed back to the front staircase. And never once did she think of the sinister possibility of bedroom doors opening, as she walked through the corridor of the fourth floor.

The train ride back was not cheerful. They did not stop off any place this time to avoid sleeping on the train. They had second class tickets as before and slept sitting up, because the Herr Professor had discovered that the little expedition had run into more money than he had calculated.

Little Gerda was sick at her stomach most of the time. She admitted, in her discomfort, that it might be due to a kind of Dutch liqueur that she had persuaded a waiter in the hotel tea room to bring her.

The Herr Professor and his protege, Wilhelm Moeller, spent nearly the entire trip discussing what had taken place at the congress.

Fraulein Pfeiffer spent most of the time looking up the Spanish words she had not understood in her German-Spanish dictionary.

In three days' time, it seemed to the Langer household as if they had never been away. Every afternoon, at five o'clock, they all sat around the dining-room table for tea: English fashion.

Almost an hour after teatime on the fourth day, Wilhelm Moeller rang the door bell. Giggling, Frieda let him in. But, instead of asking for the Herr Professor, he asked for Fraulein Pfeiffer. That made Frieda giggle so violently that she was almost unable to deliver the message.

As Fraulein Pfeiffer came into the room, Wilhelm Moeller spoke. "Fraulein Pfeiffer," before she had taken two steps, "have you the time—could you take a short walk with me at this moment?"

Fraulein Pfeiffer stopped where she was. "Yes, Herr Moeller," she said agreeably. "I am able to take a little walk at his moment. The Herr Professor is resting in his study. Please wait while I get my coat and hat."

Her coat and hat were in the hall and it did not take her long to put them on. She returned. "So! I am ready," she said.

As Wilhelm Moeller clapped his hat on his head, she smiled faintly.

It was too cold to walk all the way to the banks of the Main. She was glad when Wilhelm Moeller stopped, just around the corner from the Langers'. He looked at Fraulein Pfeiffer.

"Fraulein Pfeiffer," he said, "surely for long you must have known

how I admire you. You are so capable, you are so sturdy; for me you embody all the qualities I desire in a wife. I had my plans to tell you this before, but the Congress, it occupied my thoughts."

"Naturally," said Fraulein Pfeiffer promptly.

"So! I have asked you to take this short walk to know if you will be my wife. For me, if you will permit me to say it, you are the mother I would want for my children."

Without looking into his eyes, Fraulein Pfeiffer said rapidly: "Yes, Herr Moeller, I am honored."

"Wilhelm! Wilhelm!" he said heartily, taking her gloved hands into his. "You must call me that now."

Fraulein Pfeiffer smiled with her lips. "Wilhelm," she agreed.

"That is right," said Wilhelm. "And now—" he leaned towards her, "it is permissible, is it not?"

Fraulein Pfeiffer closed her eyes. She felt first on one cheek and then on the other Wilhelm's two kisses.

"So!" He took her elbow and wheeled her around. "Now let us go back. Let us go back and tell the Herr Professor. He will be pleased, that I know. They will all be pleased, even Frieda, not so?" He laughed heartily.

HITCH-HIKE

by

Carlton Brown

THE boy sat on the stone wall in front of the Methodist Church, jerking his thumb in the direction of Brockville every time an auto approached. Duck had a Postal Telegraph money-order from his mother to cash and there was no Postal office in Waterbridge; the nearest one was in Brockville. It was usually pretty easy to get a hitch to Brockville, especially on a Saturday in the fall with a steady stream of cars coming up from the Cape to Boston. It was the nearest big town around and everybody drove there for their important shopping. Duck jerked his thumb and shouted "Going up?" every time a car passed. About twenty cars went by before one stopped. It was a new Buick sedan and it drew up about fifty feet away from Duck. He hopped off the wall and ran to the car. The door was open when he got there.

"Climb in," the man in the car said. "How far you going?"

"Brockville," Duck said; "you going that far?"

"Yeah."

Duck slammed the door and settled back in the seat. They went along down Summer Street, past McErwin School, past Dyer's Corner, until the houses were farms with trees and fields between them. Duck looked at the man with short quick glances. He was a foreigner, probably a Polack, Duck thought. He had a disagreeable face, a little twitching drawn-in mouth and a sharp pointed nose. Duck couldn't tell a person's age very well, but he thought he must be about forty. When the man felt that Duck was looking at him he glanced quickly back, with little beady ratlike eyes. Duck thought he looked at him as though they had a secret between them or as though this man knew something about Duck that was shameful. Duck resented his personal smile. There was no beauty in his face whatsoever. The man drew a cigarette case from his pocket and

stuck one in his lips. "Have a cigarette?" he asked.

"Sure," said Duck. There wasn't much chance of running into anyone who would tell on him and the smell of it would be off his breath before he got back. He took a cigarette and stuck it awkwardly between his lips. The man slowed the car down a little and pulled the electric lighter from the dashboard. He lit his own cigarette and then handed the lighter to Duck,

The man said: "I suppose you do about everything now, huh? Smoke and drink and everything, huh? How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"I guess you do about everything, huh?" he said, looking at Duck with that peculiar false understanding in his eyes.

"Almost," said Duck. He didn't know what the man was getting at, and it embarrassed him to talk about himself.

"Go with girls, I suppose?" the man said.

"Sure," Duck lied. It wasn't exactly a lie because he did go with girls, even if it wasn't in the way the man meant. He moved as far over in the corner as he could, instinctively repelled by the man. He did not know what he feared... It was a long way to Brockville—about twenty miles—and they had only gone a quarter or so of the way.

Then the man used an expression that Duck knew. He knew what it meant as he knew what *the after life* meant: without having experienced it. It was the same thing as playing with yourself but something happened. Roger had told him about it and it had disgusted him a little and made him curious and afraid... Roger had told him about going off into the woods and doing it and Duck didn't like Roger after that because his smile was dirty when he told about it. Will I have a dirty smile when I do it, Duck wondered. Do you do that, the man asked, using the expression.

"Why?" It was a silly thing to say but he couldn't think of anything else. He wound the window down and threw the cigarette out as though it were incriminating evidence. He was burning and he felt it must be showing.

"You're thirteen and you don't do this thing?" he asked. "You'll never be a man if you don't."

"Once in a while I do," said Duck; "not very often." If it was the manly thing to do he must make this man think he did; Duck didn't know—maybe it was. "I go with women most of the time," he added, wanting to be on the safe side, whichever it was. He thought, though, that what the man was talking about was something boys did; when you got to be a man you married and didn't do it any more, he thought. He asked the man if he was married.

"Sure I'm married," the man said. "It's not so good with a woman though. I do it every night myself and it's much better." He told Duck how he did it. Duck couldn't say anything; he tried to get further into the corner.

"What say we stop up in the woods here?" the man asked.

"What for?"

"Oh, you know," the man said.

"No," said Duck, his voice quivering; "I've got to get to Brockville. I've got a date in Brockville and I'm late already."

"It won't take a minute," the man said. "We'll just stop up here in this little piece of woods and you do this to me and then we'll drive on," he was saying. When Duck dared look at him he saw the man was unbuttoning his pants. His eyes were glued with terror for a minute on what the man was doing. He wanted to cry from fear and disgust. The car was going along at a steady speed all the time. Thirty, thirty-five, thirty, the speedometer went. When the man saw that Duck was opening the door he said to him:

"Look out, kid, what're you trying to do?"

"Let me out," said Duck. "I want to get out." His voice whimpered a little. The man had both hands on the wheel now and he was dressed again. Duck sat back in his seat, shaking and red. He closed the door again. Another guy, he thought, would have knocked hell out him; another guy wouldn't be sitting here and trembling like a baby, ready to cry.

"I've got a date in Brockville," he said. "I've got a date in Brockville and I'm late already."

"All right," the man said. "Don't get scared. I'll take you to Brock-

ville all right. How about meeting me some other time when you've got more time. How about it?"

"All right," said Duck. His terror of what this man might do to him—he didn't know exactly what it was—made him say all right. He wanted to get to Brockville and out of the car and after that the man couldn't get him. If he told him he would meet him some other time the man would let him go and then he would be safe.

"When'll you meet me?" the man said. "When'll you meet me? You're not kidding, are you?"

"No," said Duck, "I'm not kidding. Let's see... when can I meet you? Guess next Wednesday night would be all right."

"Where'll I meet you?" the man asked. "Where'll I meet you next Wednesday night?"

"Oh, I guess where you picked me up today would be all right. In front of the Church where I was today."

"What time'll I meet you?" The man was excited and impatient. He kept looking at Duck and then back at the road.

"I guess about eight o'clock in front of the Church where I was today. Wednesday night at eight o'clock."

"You promise?" said the man. "Honest to God?"

"Honest to God."

"You go to Church?"

"Yes."

"All right. Wednesday night at eight o'clock in front of the Church. Honest to God?"

"Honest to God." Duck had to go to Church, but that didn't mean anything. Mother didn't believe in going to Church; maybe she didn't even believe in God. It was all right to say Honest to God if you didn't believe in God, and Duck wasn't sure whether he did or not. He told Aunt Irene he did, but he wasn't quite sure.

"All right," the man said. Duck was calmer now. "We'll have fun, huh?" Now it looked as though the man would let him alone and he would be safe. "Wednesday night, huh?" It wasn't far to Brockville now; they would be there in a little while. "Honest to God, huh?" Already

they were in Campfield and it wasn't far now to Brockville. The man was saying how it was time Duck did this thing and wouldn't they have a good time Wednesday; if it didn't rain they would go out in the woods. Duck couldn't speak. He murmured what might have been assent every time the man spoke but now he was safe and it didn't matter what the man thought of him. He wasn't scared now because between Campfield and Brockville there were a lot of houses and no patches of woods that the man could drive into. He was still trembling a little and when the man offered him another cigarette he was thankful. It gave him something to devote his attention to; he needn't talk now and the cigarette kept his hands busy. It made his head swim when the smoke cut down into his lungs and when his head was like that it mattered still less what the man was saying; he could go on talking and saying whatever he wanted to and pretty soon they would be in Brockville.

"Where do you want to get out,?" the man asked. They were coming into Brockville now, down behind a street car the man couldn't pass.

"Anywhere," said Duck. "Anywhere's all right. At the corner of Clark and Main if you're going that far."

Duck wanted to run when his feet were on the ground outside the car. The man held out his hand and said: "Honest to God? Shake on it.—Wednesday at eight same place I picked you up today."

"Honest to God," said Duck. The man's hand was wet and sticky. "So long."

"So long; see you Wednesday." The man grinned at Duck and slammed the door of the car. Duck walked away wiping his hand on the side of his pants. He would wash it as soon as possible. He mustn't touch that hand to his face or any other part of his body until he had thoroughly washed it...

All the way back on the train Duck thought about what he should do Wednesday. He would tell Roy, the bus driver, and a bunch of older guys about it and have them waiting there behind the wall when the man came up in his car. Duck would be sitting on the wall and he would walk slowly up to the man's car. He would stop with the door open and talk a little to the man and then the others would leap out from behind

the wall and go after him. Duck would hold the door open so the man would not drive away and the others would drag him out of the car and beat him up. Or should he tell Jerry, the town cop, about it? Jerry was a fat old guy who didn't look as though he could lick a flea, but of course he had a revolver and a club. No, it would be better to let the big guys beat him up. It would be fun to watch them beat hell out of the dirty bastard. After they had beat him up they could hand him over to Jerry and get him locked up. Still, what would the charge against him be? Duck didn't know just how he could explain what the guy had wanted. If he told the older guys about it, would they believe him? He hardly could believe it himself. The guy must have been a nut—Duck had never heard of any man wanting a kid to do that to him. Mother had told him to look out for strange people—but didn't she mean bad women and kidnapers? He knew he should look out for strange women on account of terrible diseases you could catch that would ruin your whole life, and he knew he should look out for strange men because they would pick your pockets or kidnap you and hold you for ransom—this other danger in strangers he had never heard of. That it was a danger he knew because he had been terrified—but just what did it consist of? And he had thought he knew so much—all about which people were good, which bad, and what constituted their goodness or badness; all the things that the other kids his age only knew about in terms of dirty words, he knew, too. The conductor who punched Duck's ticket had a friendly smile, and Duck started, finding himself wondering if perhaps this man too had a wife and asked little kids to do things for him like the other one. No, surely everyone wasn't like that man. That man was different, *abnormal* cracked. His mother had talked about abnormal people but Duck didn't know just what that meant. This man must be one of them...

Once more on the familiar, friendly streets of Waterbridge, Duck wondered if, after all, he should get the older guys to beat up that man. Shouldn't he just not be there, and say nothing about it to anybody? After all, wouldn't the kids think he had invented it? There probably wasn't another man like this one in the world—all crazy men were different—and they wouldn't believe a man could want anything like that. No,

they wouldn't understand; Aunt Irene wouldn't understand either. Mother would understand, and he would have to wait until he was with her in New York at Christmas. Not understanding, he was afraid of this man, even in his absence, and afraid now that there were other men like him, without believing it, without wanting to.

And the man had a wife! Duck knew there were things that boys did—knew from the way older kids talked—but he had always thought they did those things because they couldn't get a girl. What kind of a man was this who wanted a kid when he had a wife? If only there were someone who could explain it to him—Mother was the only one. The kids his age wouldn't know, probably—if they did know, the way they would explain it would be as different from the way they explained the making of babies was. Duck would never have admitted that the knowledge of these Waterbridge kids—natural, dirty, practical—was superior to his. It seemed a long time to wait until Christmas when Mother would tell him why this man was so.

Duck avoided Summer Street for quite awhile. Even after Wednesday he didn't like to walk down Summer Street alone, and it wasn't until the snow had come and gone that he had no tremor at passing the Church. Aunt Irene gave him the devil the next day for not going to Church. On Sunday he walked out of the house in the morning and waited until she had gone away in the car without him. When she had gone he went back in the house and sat in the kitchen with the dictionary. He looked up all the exciting words he knew, but he found nothing to explain this man. When Aunt Irene gave him the devil for not going to Church he didn't say anything. He wanted to throw a tantrum and tell her that there were a lot of things that the damned preacher and she couldn't explain to him, that he didn't want to hear about a God who kept secrets. No, he thought, I'll have to grow up sometime and what I wanted to say is not logic. He knew if he asked Aunt Irene about the man she would tell him that he was too young to know, probably not knowing herself. He sat looking straight ahead of him sullenly, thinking, thinking—he didn't know what he thought...

VISIT WITH THE MASTER

by

Theodore Pratt

AT last the taxi-cab driver found the address. The man had driven not always honestly, he thought angrily, all over the *cap* to find it. George stared out through two thicknesses of useful glass, the window of the car and his own spectacles, at the little blue sign hung on the dry stone wall like a picture. "Villa Mon Gourbi" it read and pointed down a narrow, brambly path which led in the general direction of the Mediterranean. That, then, was where the Master lived.

He got out of the cab, closed the door very precisely and stood blinking in the late afternoon sunlight which flamed on his red complexion and made it fiery. The driver sat stolidly behind his wheel, making no move to lift out or carry down the path George's heavy pigskin bag. George spoke to him sharply. It was the only way to treat the French; the more you insulted them the more they did for you. But the only service he obtained for his carefully worked-out attitude was the bag delivered into his hands and the surly information that the fare was fifteen francs.

"You mean you won't carry it for me?" George demanded shrilly. His French always became more stilted and exact when he was antagonistic.

"I am a chauffeur, Monsieur, not a porter."

Fuming himself into silence, George jerked out his wallet, extracted one brand-new blue note and one smaller, crinkly pinkish one and handed them over. The driver's hand stayed out after it had received these, but George paid no attention. He put his wallet back, patted the even set of his gray coat into proper position, picked up his bag and strode off down the path. His neck, pulled rigidly inside his collar, became no redder at the insults that were shouted after him, for it was already almost as red as it ever got.

Branches reached out, plucking at his neat clothes as if to stop him, as he made his way along the partially overgrown way. He refused, consciously, to let them annoy him away from the sacred experience that was a moment or two ahead of him. He was going to meet Alfred Pillsbury. Ever since he first read his books and studied him as a literary figure in college, he had a deep admiration for the great author. Pillsbury's works were already classics; he was a giant of the past, contemporary with all the famous literary figures of the Nineties. Some of his books were like Bibles to George, and he had long thought of their author as *Le Maître*. Now he was going to meet the Master, was going to stay with him a few days under most auspicious circumstances. Pillsbury was interested in young writers, often helped to establish them, and had been charming in his invitation to George after a mutual friend had paved the way. George still thrilled at that graceful letter with the Master's familiar signature. He had saved it; it rested in his bag now next to his own book, the novel he had written in the year his father had given him abroad in which to prove he was not cut out for business.

This visit was going to clinch that. George felt sure his writing would be approved; it followed so well, he believed, the unusual, arresting style of the Master's own books. He pictured the interesting hours of the next few days when he and the Master discussed his novel and made plans for it. There would be long evenings together, sitting with the grand old man of literature before an open fire exchanging opinions. He was glad he had brought his evening clothes with him. He liked the picture of them together in dinner-jackets; somehow it put just the right touch to the importance of the occasion. Perhaps he would write an article about his visit for one of the literary papers.

He rounded a clump of bushes and came face to face with a dilapidated red brick building before which a large garden rambled. Near him, digging in a small pile of manure, was an old man clad in a French workman's denim suit and soiled pair of *espadrilles*. He looked up as George approached and his loose mouth hung open with mild curiosity.

"C'est ici la maison de Monsieur Pillsbury?" George asked.

"You do not need to speak French," the old man said.

"Oh. You speak English?"

"Yes." The red-rimmed eyes twinkled as if in pleasure at the accomplishment.

"This is Alfred Pillsbury's villa?"

"I am Pillsbury."

"Y—?" The first part of the word escaped involuntarily as a wild sense of shock went through him.

"You're George Pendleton?" The grand old man of literature spoke graciously but nasally. He shook off a blob of manure which clung to his bare ankle and stepped forward. They clasped hands. George's pink, manicured nails rested for an instant in startling proximity to broken, dirt-encrusted claws. To them George could say none of the things he had prepared and rehearsed.

The claws waved toward some small, prickly plants that looked like cacti and might well have been as far as George was concerned. "These are my artichokes," Pillsbury said. He spoke as if he were introducing dear friends.

George put down his bag while the artichokes were shown to him. He tried to be interested but he couldn't. He was still too possessed by realization that this shambling figure, this puffy, unshaved face with its ugly brown spots, was Alfred Pillsbury. His pleasure at being in the presence of the Master was not like the kind he had anticipated.

For over an hour George was shown bean stalks, peas, tomatoes, American corn, and other plants with which Pillsbury was vitally concerned. The grand old man of literature took it completely for granted that his guest was enthusiastic about gardening. He didn't seem to notice that George's comments were perfunctory, springing merely from an irritated desire to please.

They went into the house, into a room whose greatest characteristic, next to its gloominess, was a lack of furniture. What chairs there were were rickety; the table was squarely that plain-grained variety to be found in almost every bourgeois home. George was a little bewildered. He had expected a mellow room lined with books and he could hardly believe this reality. He took refuge from it by thinking of the present he had

brought for the Master. Opening his bag, he took out a bottle of Martell.

"I brought you a little something, sir," he said. "I hope you like it."

Pillsbury took the bottle and looked at him as owlshly as he could out of running eyes he had to touch with his bandanna handkerchief from time to time. Still looking at him he called: "Susette!"

Almost instantly there came, from another room in the house, the long ye-ess of a French person speaking acquired English. A young girl, with an apron tied around her slim waist, entered. George had the sharp impression that he had never seen such a pretty maid.

Pillsbury held up the bottle of *fine*. "See what Mr. Pendleton has brought us," he said.

The girl glanced briefly at Mr. Pendleton, smiled a welcome, and then turned to the bottle. "But it is not for you," she said, "so strong." She gazed severely at the Master, and he looked at her like a bad boy caught in mischief. Some understanding seemed to pass between them, for they both laughed suddenly and gayly.

"Just open it, like a good girl," Pillsbury said.

Susette pulled the cork with her strong young arms and set glasses before them. She left the room as the Master sank lumpily onto a chair and poured out two stiff hookers. George took up his drink expecting to indulge in a toast of some kind. Before he could think anything more about it the Master had drained off his *fine* in one huge, noisy gulp. George sipped his carefully while Pillsbury waited silently. When he had done, the Master made as if to pour another drink.

"Thanks, sir. No more for me."

Pillsbury held the bottle inquiringly, disappointed like a child. Then, with a sigh, he put it down again and said: "I'll show you your room. You'll probably want to change."

Upstairs, the house was just as bare as the living-room. George's chamber was a high-ceilinged affair with a tremendous, uninviting bed watched over by a dusty red canopy. The Master, after indicating how the broken shutters on the long window could be operated, and where the bathroom could be found, left him there.

Alone with his surprise, he was not long in defending the Master.

Just because he hadn't pictured him as being so old was nothing against him. Nor was his unkempt apparel as a gardener. George kept referring in his mind to the term, gentleman farmer. That was a hobby. Everything, he decided as he eased himself into his faultless dinner-clothes, would be different that evening. He still remembered Alfred Pillsbury as he had thought of him before, as he had seen him in photographs he now knew were taken many years ago.

His pink brow contracted slightly with thought, but otherwise correct and smooth in black and white, George descended to the first floor.

Alfred Pillsbury was seated at the half-set dinner table. Before him was the bottle of Martell. It was nearly half empty. The Master was still clad in his soiled denim suit. He had not changed and George, with a start, realized that the change suggested to him was not into evening clothes but into something more comfortable than a sack suit. He flushed with discomfort. But the Master did not seem to notice and said nothing except that he hoped George liked a rabbit ragout. George said it was one of his favorite dishes. Truthfully, he abominated it. He thought it vulgar and inferior, something like Chinese eating rats. He sat down and was dumb because he was not yet accustomed to being in proximity with the literary figure he adored and because he was confused at the character of the proximity.

Susette bore in the rabbit triumphantly, uttering little cries of expectancy, and placed the blackened bowl of it in the center of the table. After that she brought a huge earthenware jug of wine which she placed on the floor. Instead of leaving the room, then, she sat down at the table. George was astounded. He looked at the Master. The grand old man licked a dribble of *fine* from his ever-open mouth and told him to help himself. He was also informed that it was his duty to keep the glasses filled during the meal.

George attacked the rabbit with gusto that was assumed the more for his endeavor not to show how much he was upset. He tried to give the Master the benefit of the doubt: In his solitude he merely had fallen into the habit of letting his servant dine with him. Then recollection of stories he had heard but never believed about Pillsbury made him revert

to the worst. He had been told that back in New York the Master had a wife and child he had deserted. There was also the rumor that somewhere was another child, an illegitimate one. Susette filled the rest of the picture, was the latest. George felt revolted and could hardly look at her sitting there blooming and laughing, swelling out with breath little, hardly-ripe breasts suspended high. The shock of the whole thing whirled his brain into thinking about those indecent advertisements he had come across from time to time in French publications. "Monsieur," he remembered, "wishes a pretty young girl in his interior for affectionate relations." That was how it was done, and he wondered if the Master had stooped to that. It was horrible. It was terrible. It was—

"You like this wine, Monsieur Pendleton?"

He found himself turning to Susette, regarding her with astonishing attention and respect. He had been busily keeping the glasses filled from the jug of ordinary *vin du pays* and he now said that he found it very good indeed.

"But that pleases Alfred," she said.

He winced at the Alfred.

"I make all my own wine," the Master said through the various obstructions in his nose. "Stamp it just as the peasants do." He went on to explain that a wine-press was no good because it crushed the stem and seeds as well as the grape. That meant a small amount of wood alcohol and headaches. "The bare foot is the best. When I made this wine the mash came up to my waist. I have stood in it up to my neck. Did you know that the peasant believes it to be beneficial to health to soak in mash?"

It made George a little sick. He could see the head and shoulders of the Master bobbing up and down behind the rim of a hogshead. He could see the smelly *espadrilles* on his feet; he could see the bare ankle to which the manure had clung. He thought of the wine he had already consumed, and stared morosely at what was left in his glass.

At the end of the rabbit George's arms were tired with the effort of lifting the heavy wine jug up and down from the floor. Pillsbury insisted upon finishing the entire contents and George was forced to do his share.

He fought successfully against its effect every time it puckered his mouth. There was no more to the meal except a resumption of activity with the bottle of *fine*. For this they used their unwashed wine glasses. A silence fell between the two men; they had never really become started conversationally; George did not feel comfortable because he had not yet revealed his many years of admiration; the Master was prone to silences and inaudible mumblings. Susette chattered on about nothing in particular. Her throaty young voice might have been attractive in other circumstances. Pillsbury, breaking as he often did into the middle of someone's sentence, recounted a story. It wasn't a very pretty story. George, in fact, flushed at it. Susette's laughter tinkled, as brittle as a spinet. The Master told another story. This time George found it would be impolite not to laugh. So he laughed with the girl, though his heart was against it. There were other stories, some told by Susette. Finally the girl and the old man turned to George sitting behind his stiff shirt and his thick spectacles.

"I'm afraid I don't know any stories, sir. That is, I'm not very good at remembering them."

George saw the animation fall out of Susette's face. It was nothing new to him to take the life out of a party; he regretted that he so often did this but none of his attempts to rectify the fault had ever ended in doing anything except making it worse. The Master fell silent until he began idly to drum a tune with his fork on a plate. It turned out to be such a good tune that he took over the metal cover of the rabbit pot as his instrument. Susette hummed it with him for a moment, and then she jumped up and began to dance.

She danced lightly, almost airily, her small feet plucking daintily at the floor, her lithe thighs giving full evidence of themselves under her thin dress. Pillsbury increased the rhythm and she whirled and turned and from her mouth came little ecstatic sounds. She ended with a stamp of her feet that made her whole body quiver deliciously.

The old man kept his music going and the girl came to George, indicating that she wanted him to dance with her. He rose and it was she who took him in her arms before they moved off together. He felt her

body pressed alive next to his and could not understand the queer feeling it gave him. He wanted to get away and at the same time he wanted to stay where he was forever.

George was given the fork and the pot cover to play while the Master and Susette danced. Pillsbury cut capers and made extravagant gestures which made the girl part her smooth lips with shrieks. The unreality of his pounding on a piece of tin while Alfred Pillsbury and a *cocotte* executed a fantastic dance came more acutely to George the longer they kept it up. He was completely nonplussed long before they collapsed, exhausted together, on a chair.

There were additional stories, a little more unrestrained this time, and more *fine*. When the last in the bottle was finished George knew that the Master was drunk. Here he was with Alfred Pillsbury so intoxicated that he could hardly speak, and with his mistress. The full force of the situation hit him when the Master's head fell to one side and stayed there woodenly.

Trembling at this shattering of his final illusion, he helped Susette get him upstairs. On the bed they laid him and then, to George's horror, began to take his clothes off. The girl showed no reluctance when the grand old man of literature was stretched out in all his bloated nudity, but went about getting him under the sheets. He seemed not to possess or need pyjamas. They stood together looking at the great head snoring and whistling from nose and mouth like a laboring steam-engine.

George moved toward the door. The girl followed and stopped him by laying her hand on his arm.

"*Merci infiniment*," she said. "It is droll, is it not so?" She perked up her face to look at him. George thought she was asking for understanding, for forgiveness of the Master. Then he looked full into her wide eyes. What he saw there made him jerk his arm away and stride frantically to his own room.

George stayed awake for a long time looking up at the canopy which hovered over his thoughts like some dark benediction. He condemned everything that had happened from the moment he arrived. He was beyond condemning the last episode with Susette, or at least he

endeavored to put it out of his mind. But he found it intruded, paramount to those he tried to force into its place. And the greatest of these was the disappointment that nothing had been said about his book. He had expected the Master to perhaps make an interested query almost as soon as he arrived. But the purpose of his coming was ignored and forgotten. The little world he had built up for this visit kept tumbling about his ears for a long time before he fell asleep.

In the morning George felt himself before his transgressors and expected apologies from the one and shamefaced contrition from the other. To his confoundment, nothing at all was said. In place of expiation, Susette, when she gave him breakfast, was sullen and perversely, hurt. The Master was nowhere in sight and George supposed him to be still in bed until he came in from the garden saying he had been up for hours and had already done a day's work. George stared at him in astonishment which changed to more astonishment when the Master asked: "Have you got any money?"

George said that he had some money.

"We've run a little short," Pillsbury sniffled. "In fact, we've only about three francs. I wonder if—"

"Certainly, sir." George took out his wallet and found that a hundred francs would be enough.

Pillsbury, as if rewarding him for the first correct thing he had done, then said: "You'd better get that book of yours."

George made a hurried visit to his bag and returned with the manuscript.

"I'll read it before lunch," the Master promised.

"Oh, I couldn't ask you to do that, sir."

"I'm a fast reader," Pillsbury told him. "I'll take it into my study right away."

He wandered off with the book into an adjoining room. George felt exhilarated. Alfred Pillsbury was reading his book after all. He was glad for the study because it provided tangible evidence that this *was* Alfred Pillsbury and not some repulsive impostor.

He took a walk on the brambly path and for the first time noticed

how closely it ran along the edge of the cliff leading abruptly down to the sea hundreds of feet below. The immensity of the sight reflected his own soaring spirits. Beneath his reserve it flared, burning him with a greater intensity because he held it in leash. He was excited, anxious, hopeful, self-conscious that his writing was being read right at that exact moment by someone who mattered. He walked on and on by the sea, hardly able to restrain himself from returning. Every few minutes or so he told himself he could go back. The Master would have finished by now. Then they would talk it over. There would be all the approbation he had dreamed about. There would be the discussion of a publisher, perhaps the Master's own...

George strode swiftly, almost running, back to the house when the sun was directly overhead. He found Pillsbury in the garden and rushed up to him.

"What do you think of these for onions?"

George, taken aback for an instant, became enthusiastic over the onions. He felt he could let himself go now that the business on which he had come was under way. But his vicarious heartiness died when nothing was said about his book. He couldn't understand it and his disappointment was heightened when Susette's voice was heard calling them to lunch.

Walking toward the house in back of the shambling figure of the grand old man of literature George, unable to contain his anxiety, timidly inquired if he had managed to read the book.

"Started it," the Master mumbled and then they entered the house and there was the wine, its bare feet and its visions of *espadrilles* stained by sweat to deal with again.

Nothing was said about the book that evening when a more important consideration was the flimsy key which broke off instead of opening a can of corned beef. Tearfully Susette brought the difficulty, along with a screwdriver and a pair of pliers, to Pillsbury. The Master attacked with these, pulled and yanked and snorted until a gooey mess oozed forth from the can. Together with a plain lettuce salad, this composed the meal. It was in connection with this that George made his first comment

about the Master's work. He recalled a passage in one of his books about salad preferences which went to the effect that the author never risked eating lettuce unless he knew the garden from which it came or had grown it himself.

"I was reading your 'Pains and Pleasures of a Gourmet' the other day, sir," he said, "and—oh!"

"What's the matter?" The Master followed George's startled gaze to his plate. There, crawling along with vigorous undulations, waving its sensitive feelers gracefully in the air, was quite a sizeable snail.

"*L'escargot!*" Susette cried. There was a silence. The Master kept on masticating noisily as if this were only an ordinary course of events and it needed musical accompaniment. Susette became genuinely concerned with the vivid color of George's face. She reached over with her fork and picked up the snail to hold it aloft for exhibition. "But it is such a pretty one!"

George pleaded fatigue that evening as an excuse for escape to his room from whatever was in store for him.

Nothing was said the following morning about his novel. The first comment of the day was in regard to the necessity of borrowing a little more money. George couldn't imagine what had happened to the first hundred francs, but readily supplied another. Susette invited him to come shopping with her and he was on the point of refusing when the Master suggested he see a little of the life roundabout.

The girl chattered him into various stores and imprisoned his arms with packages. When she had finished she laughed at his helplessness and started back to Mon Gourbi with him. On the way she removed one small package so that she could take his arm intimately. They strode along together, George stiffly burdened, the girl dancing at his side, making remarks about his hair, his red hair, his beautiful hair. Could she rumple it? she asked. Just a little. Just to rumple it out of place was what she had wanted to do ever since she saw him. George spluttered negatively. They had come to the edge of the cliff on the brambly path when Susette suddenly dropped her package, reached with both hands and took a firm grip on his hair. At the same time she darted up with

her mouth to his and held it there.

George thought he was being electrocuted. He could feel the girl's warm, sweet lips drinking at his soul, he could feel small blobs of flesh resting like two soft pigeons on his breast, he could feel delicious agony pulling at the roots of his hair. For an instant he melted and the packages loosened and began to slip from him. Then he revolted and with an inarticulate cry he twisted away. Without looking at Susette he strode off ahead of her to the house.

Lunch that day was the most painful meal through which George had ever picked. He hardly noticed that there was still no mention of his book. Susette sat stubbornly uncommunicative. Several times she showed her contempt by the way she passed him things. The Master regarded them both with that loose owliness that fitted so readily on his heavy face. George could sense but one incisive thing from their attitudes. They couldn't have expressed it better or more horribly if they had put it into the bald words that screamed in his brain. It was that if he had chosen to fill a lack it would have been more agreeable than his refusal.

He might have expected the surprise following lunch from his experience already in this house of surprises. "If you'll come in my study," the Master announced, "we'll talk about your book."

The return of George's hope and excitement didn't last long after he entered the study. At first all he could see in the tiny room was his manuscript, his precious book in abandoned evidence. Its anatomy had been taken completely apart and spread out here and there for special dissection. On the three chairs pieces of it rested, on and under the kitchen table the Master had for a desk it appeared, from under a tattered couch it peeped out, from the top of a low bookcase it dripped, it spotted almost every square foot of the unswept floor. A soft breeze lifted pages here and there as if they were fish gently flopping.

George stared, dumbfounded and stricken. The Master gazed calmly at the careless distribution. "I don't think," he said, "I can get it together again. I'm afraid you will have to do it."

It took George half an hour to assemble the manuscript in its proper order and then, with agony, he found that thirty-four pages were missing.

"That's very curious," the Master said as if he couldn't understand it. "They must be here. Have you tried in back of the couch?"

George tried in back of the couch, he worked in the rear of the bookcase, he even retrieved from under the rug, with the final result of finding all but one page. That was not to be unearthed anywhere in the room. After a short while, very red and pop-eyed, he gave it up for lost.

"Of course you have another copy of the book?" the Master asked.

"No," George said and couldn't fathom the respect still in his voice. "I haven't, sir."

"Ought to keep another copy. Always." The Master's voice scolded, made it George's fault entirely that the page was gone irretrievably.

"What do you think of it, sir?"

The Master cogitated for a moment as if the idea of thinking about it had just occurred to him. Finally he said: "It's not very good."

"It isn't?"

"I know you don't want me to tell you what isn't true. At least you shouldn't. But I am almost certain your book is really bad."

"I'm sorry to hear that, sir." George choked.

"In fact, I don't think you can do anything with it."

"Oh."

"Your story can hardly be called new. And your handling of it, your entire writing is distinctly amateurish."

"I see."

"Look here," the Master said, flipping open a page at random. "Listen to this." He read off a page. It sounded all right to George; he was rather proud of that particular section. But Alfred Pillsbury thought otherwise. "It's atrocious," he said.

The Master went on to point out why it was atrocious, why his characters might just as well have been hitching-posts, why what they did was no more interesting than a flat-iron.

At first George was angry and combative at what the Master said. He felt that this attack on his work was unjustified, that it had a good deal of worth, even more than he had previously thought it to have. Hot rage burned in his throat and he had a desire to get away from this

horrible old man who tore him to pieces so cruelly. But as the Master went on and on, having a good reason and a telling example for each of the things he pointed out, George slowly came to see that what he said was the truth. It came to him all at once like a heavy object striking him aware, that his novel was bad and that a year's work was wasted and that the future he had built up for himself was more tenuous for having tried. He said something about the advisability of his continuing to write. Alfred Pillsbury looked away, intently, at the wall. His strained, dripping eyes, however, seemed to see farther than any part of the room. In his slow voice, now more sure than George had ever heard it, he made a pronouncement and a suggestion.

"Writing," he said, "is a dog's business."

George never recollected clearly what his excuses were for leaving precipitously, that afternoon. He only remembered that they weren't contested, either by the Master or by Susette. Nothing was said about the borrowed two hundred francs as he summed up his dignity to overpower the feeling that he had been whipped by both these people and say goodbye. But even after he had shaken hands with them the final shock was not yet his. Remembering, at the last minute, that he had left his razor-strop in the bathroom, he went back upstairs to get it. And there, on the floor in an unenviable corner, he saw a torn piece of paper. Bending with unbelief, he stared at it. There was no doubt but that it was a piece from the missing page of his book. He saw familiar words there before he jerked back from it as if it might burn him. Then, pursued, he ran down the stairs, snatched up his bag and fled, calling back something about his taxicab, something about missing it.

By the time he reached the cliff on the brambly path his legs had become leaden and he still felt physically beaten. Only his brain sang with hysterical rage. He stopped and for a crazy second he tried to remember with his illusions the picture of Alfred Pillsbury he had carried with him when he first came down this path. The next second, recognizing the spot as the very one where Susette had embraced him, the picture was gone. Urged by the fierce impulse that owned him then, he ripped open his bag and yanked out his manuscript. Without hesita-

ting, he threw it over the cliff. He watched it descending, turning over and over, lumbering now slowly, darting now swiftly to its proper destination. As he watched, sickened with the fascination of this death, it found at last its blue sanctuary, he found his sanctuary, far below he saw himself without sound, hardly with splash, enter it forever. Leaving himself there, he picked up his bag and walked on.

SERENADE

by

Whit Burnett

THE house of Dr. Lane was then the largest on the Bench. It stood tall, square, solid, a big block of a place on the corner of a street that ran along the edge of the canyon. It had a curious kind of personality for a house; it dwarfed the others on the hillside, and, as I see now, honestly, squarely it dwarfed them, without frills or pretence.

There was a huge, unfenced field beside the Lane house, and no other dwellings had yet sprung up along the canyon's edge. In this field already the bluebells began, and beyond, not ten minutes up the hill, on the southern slope, the spring flowers got their soonest start.

You could see the Lane place from the city. It was a distant brownish cube on the brink of the canyon not far from Butler's Folly, a grey stone tower a man had build in the earlier days which he hoped people would climb and pay a quarter to see the view of the valley below, the wide sweep of town and farm land, the growing city, and the rimming mountains to the east, the west and south. No one had climbed the foolish tower, for the North Bench's view was just as good from the hill as from the tower, and old man Butler died without profit from his dream.

There are many ways of dying without profit from a dream. A person need not build a tower; he may be too timid...

There were two young daughters, Ruth and Ethel. Ruth was the older, and two grades ahead of me in school. Ethel was a grade or so behind, and she was a year or two younger than I. I don't remember when I first began to think of Ethel Lane.

You remember a lot of other things though.

Their house was not in our neighborhood; we lived along the Bench

in two rooms. But I saw them both now and then when I used to walk over to the canyon. Ruth was pert and straightforward. Whenever we met she said hello, but Ethel whom I'd never met said nothing, and Ruth, whom I knew only slightly, never introduced us.

Their father was a physician. His hair was white, although he was not an old man. He had a brisk white moustache, and he must have been a very good doctor, or very high priced; no one in our neighborhood ever had him.

I never in my life spoke to Dr. Lane. He was never aware of my existence. I never thought of him as a man, particularly, a man who must tire, take off his eyeglasses, wash, sleep, eat and bother about bills. I had unlimited respect for him. I should have been utterly embarrassed had he ever spoken to me as we passed on the street: he was the father of Ethel Lane.

When I passed by the Lane house, I sometimes saw him outside by the garage. He had the only car on the hill, a big red machine. And he wore long gauntlet gloves.

Once or twice when I passed on the other side of the street I saw Mrs. Lane and the girls sitting on the porch. But I did not take off my hat, because at that time I did not know them very well.

I kept my eyes straight ahead until I got to the end of the block. Perhaps, I thought, they didn't see me, anyway.

One night I went down to my cousin's place. He was my age and he had a bicycle. We were good friends and even when we did not have much to say we used to fit into each other's humors.

He wasn't home.

I had been alone all day. I wanted to be with somebody.

At the corner I saw Herb Scott. He was alone too.

"Hello," he said. "Where you going?"

"No place."

We stood under the street lamp a while and talked. Herb was fourteen. He was already in high school and had books which once when

I saw them delighted me with the mystery of high school. Geometry. Latin. I did not especially like Herb, but I was bound to give him credit. My cousin was my own age, and he was not in high school either, nor were either of us as tall as Herb. Herb was the son of a minister, but that did not interfere with his playing hockey or soccer. He was a good fast skater.

"Well," I said, "I guess I'll mosey along."

"It's too early to go home yet," said Herb. "I tell you, let's go over to Dr. Lane's place and watch Ruth and Ethel get undressed."

"What?"

"Sure. You can see 'em as plain as day. They sleep on a sleeping porch and they get undressed there every night with the light on."

It was a warm spring night, moonless, but starry.

"Ah, go on. You're crazy!"

"Come on. I'll prove it."

You went.

At the edge of the field Herb stopped.

"Shhh! Can the jabbering. You got to go quiet now."

Against the sky the big block of Lane's house loomed up. Lights were on downstairs. One, in a big window, was suddenly turned out. Upstairs there were lights in two windows. As we lay in the field on our bellies, a light was turned on in the sleeping porch upstairs. The porch faced west and south, looking down the canyon and across the field and sloping streets to the lights of the city in the valley.

"A swell night, ain't it?"

"Shut up, can't you!"

By and by the light upstairs went out and only the light on the sleeping porch was burning.

The voices of the two girls, we could barely hear them. We couldn't tell what they were saying. Now and then they laughed or giggled. The porch was boarded up solid three or four feet from the floor. Now and then we got a glance of somebody's head moving around on the porch. But we couldn't tell through the screen whose head it was.

"They're goin' to bed now," said Herb.

"Yes."

"They're not bad kids. Ruth, anyway."

"I don't know 'em."

"Don't know 'em? Jeess, I thought you knew 'em."

There's where you lied. Why didn't you say you knew them? What was the matter with you? Not Ruth, necessarily. But Ethel. You knew Ethel. You knew how she walked, swingingly, as if she were walking in time to some little song she heard. You knew her. You had watched her, the first girl you had ever watched.

A block away.

But you knew the color of her hair, even. Brown. The light brown of a maple leaf that has just touched the ground. And the color of her eyes. Blue. Like the blue of the creek on a clear day when the blue of the sky has lost itself in a pool.

"No, I just seen 'em around now and then."

The light upstairs went out.

The two boys lay for a while amid the weeds in the quiet darkness of the field. The earth was not chill. To the north glittered the Pole star. They picked out the Big Dipper. Then they sat up and looked far down on the lights of the city lining out the even streets, the state road a yellow string stretching to the south, and the heart of the city a clustered glow.

"Ruth is a swell girl," said Herb, finally. "If I was ever going to marry anybody, I guess it would probably be Ruth."

He never married her, either.

For a time a child's life is bound by his neighborhood. Herb Scott lived in one neighborhood. I lived in another. And the Lane girls lived in another. We had gone to different schools, and we all had different friends. But when I found that Herb knew the Lane girls, I used to see more of Herb. Sometimes I went down to his place without bothering about my cousin. It was sometimes an hour or two, though, before I could get around to touching on the subject. And then not Ethel.

You used to touch upon her name enough alone. Ethel. Ethel. Ethel.

"Ever see anything of those Lane girls?"

Nope, he was too busy. Or Ruth Lane was nothing in his life.

But one day in August Herb said:

"How about moseying over to Dr. Lane's place? Maybe we'll run into the girls."

It was a hot afternoon. Ruth was reading on the big front porch.

"Hello, there, Ruth," said Herb. He was the one for speaking right up.

"Hello, Herbert."

"How about a little walk?"

"All right."

She dropped the book and came down.

"Ain't Ethel home?" he asked.

"Sure, I'll call her. Where shall we go? Let's go up to the first power house. Let's race to the corner?"

When Ethel came out, one could see how much smaller, finer and more beautiful she was than her sister. She still wore a hair-ribbon. That's because she is still in grade school, I thought. I stood looking at her as she came down the steps. When she joined us, we just started out—no one introduced us.

We didn't talk for half a block.

Ruth and Herb suddenly raced ahead. They came to the corner together hot and puffing.

"Jees, she's a peach of a runner, ain't you Ruth?" said Herb. We were out of sight of the Lane house. We had turned a corner where the road went down the canyon to the creek.

"I'll say I am," said Ruth. She gave Herb a push.

They tugged and shoved at each other for two or three minutes as we came up.

"I bet I could kiss you," said Herb.

He grabbed hold of Ruth and she struggled and bent her head from side to side. Finally he got both her arms and bent after her head, and when she turned her face he kissed her on the cheek. They both laughed.

"That's the way to do it," said Herb.

Ethel and I stood looking at them. I was embarrassed.

You were afraid to death.

"Look, Jim," said Herb, "why don't you kiss Ethel? Go on. You're scared, aren't you? I bet you never kissed a girl in your life. Go on. She'll let you. Won't you, Ethel?"

They all looked at me.

"Go ahead," said Herb.

"She won't eat you," he said.

Suddenly he grabbed Ethel and before anybody realized it he had kissed her, hard and loud. She straightened up and pulled at the red sweater she was wearing and smoothed back her hair. She didn't say anything. She looked at me.

"That's the way to do it," said Herb. "She ain't made of glass."

Ruth and he laughed.

Why didn't you hit him?

Ethel stood on a little rise in the hilly ground and stared down into the canyon. I caught her eye once, but I could not bear to look at her. We all walked down the road, finally, toward the creek in the bottom.

"What school do you go to?" she asked.

"I'm going to high school next month when school opens."

"You live over on G street, don't you?"

"Yes, I live over on G street."

"When you start going to high school, what will you do, walk, like Herbert Scott does?"

"Oh, I guess so. Yes, I guess I'll walk."

We didn't say anything more for a while.

"I go to the Lafayette," she said. "I won't be in high school for two whole years."

"There's the Lafayette," she pointed across the canyon. "I walk, too."

We sat with the others for a while on the bridge by the power station, looking down into the water and swinging our legs. The canyon was green with rich leaves and the sun was softeningly warm.

"Sometime," said Herb, "we ought to come up here and bring a

real picnic."

When we got back to the Lane house, it was still early afternoon. At the corner we shook hands with the girls and Ethel said:

"When you start to high school, you might call for me, and we can walk as far as the Lafayette together."

..."They're a nice couple of kids," said Herb, on the way home.

How did you hear? You heard nothing. You were not walking back. You were not walking at all. You were not noticing if there were trees or houses by the sidewalk, or whether Herb was there or somewhere else.

You were thinking, Yes, sir, that's what she said. Yes, sir. All you were thinking was, Yes, sir. Yes, sir!

I didn't see much of Herb any more. I didn't need to. I had enough to think about. I didn't want to spoil anything by talking about the things I had to think about. I had to think about high school. About the new cadet suit I would wear. I had to think about Ethel.

On drill days, I thought, I bet it will be fine. Me walking past the Lane house in my new uniform at half-past eight in the morning, and Ethel there waiting for me, and then the two of us just ambling on down the canyon hill, over the creek, and up the other side to her school, and then me tipping my hat and jaunting on to high school.

I suppose she will like the uniform, I thought.

You did not pass by the house any more at night, at pitch dark, when the girls were going to bed? You did not lie in the field with Herb anymore?

He did not pass by the house any more at night when he thought the girls were going to bed. Often, however, he passed within a block or so of it, usually on the opposite side of the street.

He felt an odd warm affection for the house. Even the very street, and the alphabet letter of the avenue seemed personal and significant. And whenever he walked to town, he managed to take a way that led along the street in which the Lane house stood. But a block or so away he turned into another street and so went by it skirtingly.

You spent all the time just talking in your head. Well, Ethel... I'll tell you, Ethel... Shall we go to the theatre, Ethel... Or would you rather dance, Ethel?

You couldn't dance.

On Saturday, the day you drove the grocery cart, a lump of fear swelled inside you every time you read over the delivery slips, hoping there was nothing to deliver at the Lanes. There never was. She never saw you in the cart, earning the dollar and a quarter you saved up for high school!

It was a long time till school began.

The first time was almost too painful. None of the smart things came. None of the big fine speeches.

But the second and third walks were a little more carefree.

"Well, so long till tomorrow then, at half-past eight..."

"Ethel..."

The sky was clear. The trees were turning color. Fall was like a sharp bright fragment. The air was good. Swinging the arms, the muscles tensed. Would it be better to be a great violinist, bringing a bow across the strings so well that everyone who heard should almost want to cry with big strange joyful swinging feelings? Solvejg's Song... My heart at thy sweet voice... Or write great books? Or make important speeches...

Drigo's Serenade... All the time whistling Drigo's Serenade. With those light and pretty triplets slurred.

He was growing extremely fast, and his long legs and hands became a gangling gracelessness.

His hands were hot or else too cold. Sometimes white and numb in the cold; sometimes purple with too much blood. He began to like vaudeville shows and books he could not wholly understand. He took long walks far up the canyon, over the hills. The violin he hardly looked at. Once he sat looking at the creek for two full hours.

George Anderson was in his early morning class. He lived on K street.

"Say," said George, one day, "what time do you start in the mornings, anyway?"

"Oh, I don't know," he stumbled, "it varies. Sometimes I don't walk even. I grab a street car."

"Well, wait for me tomorrow. I'll pick you up and we'll walk over together."

You couldn't say you called every morning for a girl.

At the Lane house, when the two boys passed, she was standing on the porch. She had on a new dark red sweater that made her look very pretty. He blushed in confusion. She hesitated, seeing the strange boy with him. Then she joined them.

"This is my friend, Ethel Lane," he said. Once it was said, he felt very proud.

After they left her at the school and went striding along faster now they didn't have a girl with them, George said:

"Gee, do you walk to school with her every day? Why, she doesn't even go to high school!"

George kept calling for him, whistling at the front sidewalk before he'd had time to leave. George was all right; he was a good guy.

Then the day he left early enough to avoid George, she was not waiting. She was already down the canyon trail, and he could see the of red flash a long way ahead. He ran and called. He meant to say, Look here, I'm not going to come by with George any more. Look here, Ethel.

Once she turned and saw him, but she went on, and before he got as far as her school, she was already inside the big stone building.

...She was just a kid. Maybe George was right.

I didn't call at the Lane place any more, and unless I went there I never ran into Ruth or Ethel.

It was not so simple as that.

The house was still there, and the avenue, and even when there was no need to be in the neighborhood, he found himself walking in the direction of Dr. Lane's place. Sometimes he got within a block of it and

stood looking over toward the house.

After supper he left the table and went out into the dark. It was a mile or more to the Lane house. But the night time view from the edge of the canyon, over the lights of the town, was worth the walk. He walked alone. At the edge of the canyon he stood for a long time, staring down at the town below, or across the gulch to the black hills opposite, rounded and smooth with age.

Night after night he walked through the streets close to the Lane house. But not too close. He was afraid to go too close. He stayed on the opposite side of the street. Once or twice he caught a glimpse inside of Mrs. Lane reading a book or a paper. The yellow friendliness of the inside of the house was a pain for him, a curious hurt in his stomach.

He was afraid someone would see him and wonder why he was hanging around like that. He wondered why himself. He avoided the little circle of silver beneath the corner arc-light and skulked about, lost and miserable, in the darkness.

One night he walked home from town, up the A street hill, and past the tower. The autumn was still warm and the air had a curious scent, the remembered dampness of spring. The night was heavy with coming rain and there were no stars. He walked through the field beside the Lane house. Then he sat down on the ground. He told himself he was suddenly tired.

A few lights on the south side of the house were still burning. Upstairs the sleeping porch light was turned on. He leaned on his elbows and looked up at the distant square of light.

She was too good for him. He had lost her.

Ethel, he kept saying, softly. Ethel.

The uniform was not new, anyway. It was a distant relative's. Worn a year before you bought it from him. Second-hand pants. Maybe that was it, too. They were pretty faded.

And you had no nerve. Standing at the telephone. Looking up her number. Dr. Lane. Writing her name. Penning unmailed letters. Making long speeches that were never spoken.

The window light burned steadily in the darkness. It was a link, at

least. So were the walks, and the tryst with the house in which she lived.

Once it occurred to him that there was something very ancient and curious in this abject situation, in this being drawn to the place where she lived and the standing there, unobserved in the night, gazing, without appeasement, at the castle of the unattainable. It was perhaps what the old Italians had done, only they had sung out songs beneath the balconies, looking at the casements from which fell the long and precious hair of the one they wished to die for.

You could not sing.

Nor did it ever occur to you to climb old Butler's tower and leap off spectacularly as a sign of your love and contrition.

You do not even remember when, nor why, you finally came to an end of paying these hurt, lost, nocturnal visits to her house.

There were distractions, certainly.

Jobs. Journeys.

And there must have been other girls, in all that time.

There were other girls.

And the war, when it came, served one purpose: it disposed of our infant loves.

It disposed of our loves...

One day, when I was back for a visit, I saw her in a box at a theatre. She was seated with a young man in a lieutenant's uniform. I was in the parquet and our eyes met once. But we did not smile.

He was quite a handsome young fellow and looked very well in the lieutenant's uniform.

I went right on talking to the girl beside me.

The show was not very interesting.

Why didn't you call her up like a sensible person then, and not go back like a fool, mooning about the house?

You could have told her things the lieutenant had never dreamed of. You could have taken her on the walks you planned, beside the creek where the trout lay quick and beautiful, by the silver birches, white and naked,

clean as poems, their little yellow leaves all but tinkling out a song... And talked... of her and music, of her and places on the sea, of life serene and clean as a white bird's breast and wing... of books and waves and tea and poetry... stringing fine bright words in chains, glistening like waterdrops in the sun.

From a training camp one night when he could not sleep he wrote her a very long letter.

When she answered, her letter was quite grown up, and sprinkled with phrases in French. She was awfully pleased to hear from him.

There was much distance in the letter, in the grown space which lay between them.

When he got out of the army he remained for a long time three thousand miles away. When he returned finally, she was finishing college, and when they passed each other in the street he took off his hat, but fled on quickly.

We did not talk.

You can regret that all the days of your life.

He was ashamed of all the insane tender things he had poured out in a letter. She was more beautiful than the dreams he had slept with; and her eyes were as soft as silk.

When I have written several books and every one knows me, I said, I will come into your house and claim you.

When he was several years older, he came back to the place where he was born.

He was an important man.

He was very successful, and he wore a moustache and carried an impressive cane.

There were more houses. The hills were not so tall, nor the canyon so vast and deep, nor the city so big as he had remembered.

He took a stroll by himself.

He strolled along the street that led to the house of Dr. Lane.

There was the field, no longer so weedy or so wild. There were other houses in it.

The tower was still there, leaning slightly, like the tower of Pisa, the steps gone and the opening boarded up, the boards carved with initials, knived in by kids like he had been himself.

The tower was not very impressive and he wondered why the man had ever hoped to extract quarters from anyone.

He kept avoiding the corner where he could see the Lane house.

But finally he walked along further and then he looked over toward it.

It was a large, homely building, square, two-storied, flanked with a wide front porch and upstairs porches in back.

He looked for a while at the house, pleased that it had no meaning any more for him.

He balanced on his stick a moment and then he turned away.

He felt very fine with his big moustache, and he swung the stick casually as he walked along.

He remembered when he had received the Nobel Prize.

He said his own name over to himself, several times over.

He did not bother about a girl running down a canyon trail ahead of him. He had never even kissed the girl; never touched her hair.

Where she was he did not care.

He only thought a moment about the lieutenant. And Ethel.

Ethel Lane.

I have been a liar in this story.

I have been a liar, Ethel Lane.

I am no success. The moustache is as sad as Verlaine's.

I am still as poor as the second-hand pants.

And when I came into your street, I was a liar to myself. I knew he was dead. I knew you were there.

What is always wrong with you?

And when I came up to the house, I could not climb the steps. I could not do it. And I stood there looking at your house, with my insides twisted as before, and tears weak in my eyes, till I ran down the canyon in the dark to catch the train away.

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